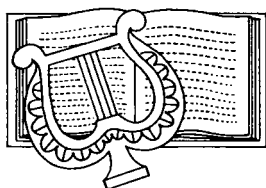


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In Memoriam

Ruth Candler Lovett

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VARIETIES OF LIFE ;

OR,

CONDUCT AND CONSEQUENCES.

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY THE AUTHOR
OF "SKETCHES OF CHARACTER."

"If I give speeches and conversations, I ought to give them justly ; for the *humours* and *characters* of persons cannot be known, unless I repeat what they say, and their *manner* of saying."

RICHARDSON.

VOL. I.

LONDON :

PRINTED FOR LONGMAN, HURST, REES, ORME, AND BROWN,
PATERNOSTER ROW.

1815.

VARIETIES OF LIFE.

CHAP. I.

MR. BOLINGBROKE, an elderly gentleman of large fortune, set out from London at the close of an important session of parliament, in which he had greatly distinguished himself, to spend some time with his brother in Wales, previously to visiting his estate in Staffordshire.

Some unpleasant family occurrences had tintured his mind with a gloom which considerably added to the natural austerity of his temper. Mr. Bolingbroke felt this: and while he vainly endeavoured to persuade himself, that his

was a just cause of resentment, he was far from being satisfied with his own conduct: he could not conceal from himself that it was actuated by family pride, and the opinions and prejudices of the world: the conviction that he possessed not the resolution to shake off these trammels, had the double effect of putting him out of humour with himself, and with that world for which he had sacrificed so much.

The acuteness of his feelings, however, daily experienced some diminution, and he was now in better spirits than he had been in for many years. The figure he had lately made in the senate, transfused into his heart a certain self-applause, which tended to dispose him for the enjoyment of society. In this temper of mind, Mr. Bolingbroke had accepted his brother's invitation to Llanwyllan; and though unaccustomed to derive any great gratification from objects

merely visual, he could not be wholly indifferent to the romantic scenery of the country, through which he was now for the first time travelling.

It was a glowing summer's afternoon; and as the carriage swiftly turned the corner of a road, which branched off on one side into a green lane, Mr. Bolingbroke's ear was struck with the sound of youthful laughter; at the same instant two beautiful boys, apparently about eight years of age, rushed across the road towards a stile on the opposite side. The youngest, in pursuit of the other, fell—and the postillions had just time to stop the horses, to prevent their running over him.

Mr. Bolingbroke was not a man endowed with much feeling, but the accident excited more than common interest; and a servant coming up to the boy's as-

sistance, Mr. Bolingbroke enquired of him who the children were.

“ They are Captain Worthington’s, Sir.”

“ And they live —— ?” continued Mr. Bolingbroke, with some agitation.

“ Not far off, Sir; at the cottage you see there, between the trees. My master is just gone to sea.”

“ Papa has got a ship Sir,” said the eldest boy; “ the Thunderbolt, a seventy-four.”

“ And what is your name, my little fellow ?”

“ Arthur Sir; and my brother’s name is George.”

A tear unbidden swam in Mr. Boling-

broke's eye, and unchecked, rolled down his cheek.

“ Your mother is well—and happy—.”
Mr. Bolingbroke scarcely knew what he said: ashamed of his weakness, he turned aside to conceal his emotion, and drawing off a brilliant from his finger, he gave it to the child, and bidding him take care of it, ordered the postillions to drive on.

Mrs. Worthington was playing with a little girl in the garden before her cottage, when her two boys appeared at the gate.

“ Oh Mamma! Mamma!” exclaimed Arthur, running up to his mother, and tip-toeing to shew her his glittering treasure; “ look here! see what I have got!”

Mrs. Worthington regarded the ring for a moment with a perplexed air; then suddenly taking it out of Arthur's hand,

she eagerly examined the reverse——
“ Where did you find this, Arthur?” enquired Mrs. Worthington with considerable agitation.

“ A gentleman gave it to me—.”

“ Were you with them, Johnson?”

The servant began explaining what had happened, when Mrs. Worthington, almost breathless with expectation, eagerly demanded who was in the carriage.

“ An old gentleman, ma’am, who looked out to see whether the little boy was hurt—he seemed mightily taken with master Arthur, ma’am, and asked their names, and—”

“ And didn’t he cry, Johnson?” said George.

“ I think I did see tears in his eyes,

ma'am, when he gave his ring to master Arthur."

"And then the chaise drove away," added George, "and he gave nothing to me----."

Mrs. Worthington went musing into the house: she knew the ring;—it had been her mother's, and since her death had been worn by her father. What can he mean, thought Mrs. Worthington; can it be possible that after ten years of resentment, an incident of so unimportant a nature should have awakened emotions of tenderness towards his poor daughter---does he send this to me as a pledge of his returning affection?---what am I to think? how am I to act?—oh that my Augustus were now here to advise.

The adventure certainly seemed to pro-

mise well, and Mrs. Worthington indulged a hope that her father might shew a further disposition towards a reconciliation; then she considered he might naturally expect that she should now make some advances on her part: but she knew her husband's independent spirit; and while affectionate duty urged her to forget a father's past unkindness, and seek to engage his heart towards his grandchildren, she was fearful of incurring a beloved husband's displeasure.

After deliberating for several days on this trying occasion, she resolved upon a middle course; and wrote a letter to her father, in which she spoke of his interview with her children, in such a manner as she thought calculated to excite a further interest in their behalf; but fearing to express more than her husband might approve, she made no direct appeal for a general forgiveness; and the

letter might be considered rather as an acknowledgment of the kindness manifested to her son, than as one soliciting a reconciliation.

Mr. Bolingbroke, on leaving his two grand-children, felt some uneasy sensations at his past neglect. The infant years of his daughter were brought to his remembrance: in Arthur he traced her features; and the name he bore was his own; but in George, he fancied he saw the stamp of his father, and his soul recoiled from the resemblance. He arrived at his brother's in a state of mind ready to have received and forgiven his daughter; but all the Bolingbroke pride was assembled at Llanwyllan to repel these emotions; his brother's wife, a woman of haughty manners and sarcastic spirit, he dreaded most: stern and inflexible in her own opinions, she treated capricious and fluctuating dispo-

sitions with undisguised contempt. Mr. Bolingbroke thought it best to conceal from his family the adventure he had met with, till he should receive from his daughter such a letter as might be shewn to them, and ensure their approbation to his extending towards her that paternal regard which still warmed his bosom: but his affections had been only gently roused; he felt disappointed in not hearing sooner from Mrs. Worthington: family prejudice re-assumed its ascendancy, and the intercourse with the haughty circle in which he was now placed, had almost effaced the recollection of the interview with his grandchildren, when his daughter's letter arrived.

It was not such a one as he had expected; and without taking into consideration the circumstances which naturally made it embarrassing for Mrs.

Worthington to address him, he despatched his answer before the effects of his disappointment had subsided.

It was couched in cold terms, expressing a satisfaction that she was well, and wishes for her happiness; but Adelaide looked in vain for any assurances of forgiveness. It adverted not to her husband; but, glancing slightly at the incident which had introduced her sons to him, he proposed to take Arthur under his protection; hinting at the same time, that in doing so, he must be considered as having the entire guardianship of him.

This was a step Mrs. Worthington felt she had no right to take, without her husband's concurrence; she therefore replied to her father, repeating her thanks for his kindness, and cautiously letting him understand she would write more decisively as soon as she could obtain

the sentiments of another, whom she durst not name to her father, but whose approbation was nevertheless indispensable.

Mrs. Worthington lost no time in writing to her husband, but several months elapsed before she received his answer. He confessed he had many objections to the plan, but considering the advantages it promised to his son in a pecuniary point of view, he conceived he should not be justified in withholding his consent.

Mrs. Worthington having made the necessary communication to her father, every thing was soon arranged for Arthur's departure.

It was late in the evening when John Wingrove, an old servant of Mr. Bolingbroke's arrived at Mrs. Worthington's

cottage, for the purpose of conducting the little boy to his grandfather.

“ My dear young lady !” cried the old man, as he took Mrs. Worthington’s offered hand, while with his other he dashed off a starting tear, “ I’m glad to see you look so well, indeed I am.”

Mrs. Worthington gave him a hearty welcome, and mutual enquiries passed between them.

“ What fine children your’s be, Miss,” cried Wingrove, as the boys and their elder sister were taken away to bed—“ and I shall see the little lady to-morrow—is she like you ma’am ?—dears heart ! I recollect you Miss, when you was born. My poor dear lady was taken ill in the midst of a large party we had to dinner ; there was Squire Pinckney’s family, and my Lady Downashton and

her son, and his lady—and I don't know who besides—and there, I saw madam wasn't well by no means ; and says I to nurse Matthus, nurse, says I, the company bain't all come yet, says I ; there's one more to come yet. And who's that? says she ; what, is Mr. Long expected, or Squire Greenly?—no matter nurse, says I, perhaps 'twill be neither squire Long nor squire Short, but the company bain't all come, for all that, says I ; and sure enough, in half an hour after, *you* came to town."

Mrs. Worthington had often heard the account of Squire Long and Squire Greenly, and well knowing how many other stories generally followed, of the same nature, she endeavoured to break the thread of his recollection, by some enquiries relating to more recent events, and particularly respecting her father.

“ Why Miss ;—there, I call you *Miss*, still;—why as to master, he is to be sure a little altered ; I can’t but say, but what he is—I can’t please him somehow as I used to ; and sometimes he speaks harsh-like to me—but there—I know, ’tis—you see,—that affair—that day as you,—excuse me, my dear young lady ;, and I hope and trust all will be well ’it ; the old gentleman will take his time about it---I can’t but say, but what *I* was vexed too, for I knew all your family wished so much to see you and Squire Estcourt come together ;---but there, if it wasn’t to be, why it wasn’t to be---and if so be, as you liked the captain better, you was in the right to have him, and ’tis all for the best I dare say, nor ’tisen’t for us——”

The garrulous old man was running on, wide of the mark, when Mrs. Worthington was again obliged to interpose,

and having obtained from him many particulars which she was anxious to hear, and many more which she could well have dispensed with, she wished Wingrove a good night, and retired to bed.

The next morning, Arthur being equipt for the journey, his mother took him to her room, where, straining him to her bosom, she gave vent to those emotions which a true mother only feels, and having given him such advice as was suited to his tender years, she conducted him to the carriage.

“ God bless you, my dear lady,” cried old Wingrove.

“ Good bye, mamma---good bye George and Ellen,” said Arthur, with tears glittering in his eyes; “ good bye little Sophy.”

“ Ta, ta,” said the nurse, making the baby shake its hand.

Though Mrs. Worthington felt that Arthur would be now placed in affluence, she could not suppress some uneasy reflections: she considered the dangers to which a youth enjoying an independence is exposed; she feared that his grandfather would educate him in those prejudices which shaded his own character; that he might interdict any intercourse with his father; and that Arthur might thus become an alien to his nearest relatives. Under these impressions she condemned herself for parting with her son; but she consoled herself with the idea that Arthur might be the happy instrument of bringing about a general reconciliation.

Arthur was now proceeding on his journey to Bolingbroke Court, in Staf-

fordshire: he was very inquisitive on the road; but old Wingrove, though extremely talkative, was much more inclined to speak of things which were totally uninteresting to his young companion.

“Are we almost come?” Arthur would often ask, and as often received for an answer, “Oh, we have a great many miles to go yet;” at length, however, Mr. Wingrove gave him some hopes of arriving at the end of his journey.

“Now Master Arthur! look out yonder! there!! that’s your grand-papa’s.”

Arthur descried a large mansion, standing on an eminence, backed by tall trees, which stretched on each side for a considerable distance; in front appeared an extensive park. Wingrove had now

something to say to every one they met: he stopped to chat a few minutes with the landlord of the Bolingbroke-arms, and soon afterwards as they passed over a bridge he exclaimed, “ there ! now we are come to our estate---all this is your grand-papa’s.”

“ What, all those trees, and all those houses, and fields !”

“ Every thing for miles round.”

Arthur seemed lost in amazement, while Wingrove expatiated on the beauties of the place, till they arrived at the lodge.

“ Here we are, Mrs. Bevan, come at last---here’s a fine boy !”

“ Well, only to think !” cried the old woman, “ how time do run---lack a day, why it seems to me but ’isterday as it

all happened----bless me," continued Mrs. Bevan, " 'tis a nice little gentleman indeed,---well, and you saw, I suppose ----" Mrs. Bevan was going to make further enquiries, but Wingrove desired her to postpone her curiosity a little, and ordered the carriage to proceed.

Mr. Bolingbroke was walking on a terrace at the end of his garden, when he observed the chaise approach; but instead of extending his walk to meet his little guest, he returned to the house, and acquainting the housekeeper that his expected visiter was arrived, he desired her to go out to receive him, and retired to his own room.

" Why, you be a fine boy, indeed," observed Mrs. Mount, taking Arthur by the hand, and stroking back the hair from his forehead, while she intently examined his features; " and who are

you like, little master ; let me see—why he's got my young missuses eyes. Ah ! and he's like the picture of the Lady Gertrude, that hangs in the blue drawing-room."

" I'faith," cried the butler, " he's like the Captain, though !"

" Come, young Sir," said Mrs. Mount, " let me shew you the way to your grand-papa's room."

Mr. Bolingbroke received Arthur with many expressions of kindness, but there was little appearance of warmth in his manner ; and after putting a few trivial questions to him, they parted for the evening.

Poor Arthur was but little gratified with this specimen of affection :—during his journey the successive novelties that attracted his attention on the road, had

somewhat effaced the parting scene with his mother; but now, the tears flowed plentifully from his eyes, and he could not but think the cold grandeur of Bolingbroke Court, a poor exchange for the happy cottage, and the beloved relatives he had left.

Mr. Bolingbroke had not sought the child as a companion in his solitary abode, but merely as a being who would probably inherit the Bolingbroke estates; and as such, he was desirous to have him brought up in a manner that should correspond with his rank in life: he had no idea of watching over the infant mind, of checking the seeds of vice, or of encouraging the opening germes of virtue; all he knew of the duty he owed to his grandson, was to give him what he considered proper ideas of his future consequence, and the best education which public schools afforded.

CHAP. II.

ARTHUR being, at so early an age, removed to such a distance from his family, could have but little intercourse with them: a few letters were occasionally written to his mother, which, at first, were merely communicative of his being well, and the studies in which he was engaged: as he grew older, other pursuits occupied his thoughts; and as these were not always fit subjects for his letters, correspondence with those who were anxious to hear a good account of him, became irksome, and his mother

was grieved to find that the consequences, which she had apprehended from his removal from her care, had been too surely anticipated.

In the meanwhile, his brother led a very different life ; educated in retirement, he enjoyed the society of his beloved family, while, at the same time, he pursued his studies under the care of the reverend Mr. Shirley, who, having several sons whom he educated himself, had been prevailed on by many of his friends to take their children also under his tuition: by degrees he established a tolerably large school, which he conducted upon such a plan as procured him general patronage, but unfortunately without insuring to himself an adequate emolument. The living of Aberfowey too was very inconsiderable, and as Mr. Shirley was by no means of a strong

constitution, and his health being now in a declining state, his means for providing for his family were very limited. He judged it prudent to bring up his children with very humble ideas as to their station in life, though he did as much as lay in his power to put them forward in the world. His eldest son he apprenticed to an apothecary ; the second was with a respectable bookseller ; and the others were as yet too young to have formed any serious thoughts on their future destination in life.

Mr. Shirley had two daughters, and though extremely averse to trusting them from his own and their mother's eye, yet the circumstance of his keeping a boys' school, induced him to consent to a temporary separation, and Maria, who was several years older than her sister, was placed at an excellent school in Bristol.

She always spent her holidays at home, and as George Worthington often came to see Mr. Shirley during the vacations, he had frequent opportunities of becoming acquainted with his daughter, whose various good qualities rendered her an object of his affectionate regard.

Soon after George had been placed at Mr. Shirley's, an incident occurred, wherein his generosity and disinterestedness gained him the friendship of Henry Maitland, a boy who was two or three years his senior, and whose steady application to his studies had placed him at the head of the school.

The mother of Henry was a widow, who had resided in the neighbourhood for many years, but no one appeared to know any thing of her relatives or connexions: she never spoke of them; was reserved in her communications respect-

ing herself, and nothing was known concerning her husband. She lived in a retired manner, but appeared to possess a handsome income, and her son, it was understood, was intended for a profession.

Mankind is naturally curious ; and when we are unable to obtain a satisfactory explanation of circumstances which excite inquiry, we are apt to form conclusions of our own to supply the deficiency. Mrs. Maitland's history, therefore, being so carefully concealed from her inquisitive neighbours, they chose to imagine that she had been the *chère amie* of some man of fortune, who, on marrying, had settled an annuity on her and his child. As her manners were pleasing, and her deportment perfectly correct, many regarded her with increased interest, and considered her as an amiable

woman of a respectable family and good education, who had been imposed on by a fraudulent marriage.

These accounts, at first whispered by one or two, as probable ways of accounting for Mrs. Maitland's silence with regard to her family and past life, were afterwards received as well known facts.

The stigma on Henry's birth, however, was far from lessening the number of his friends: his beautiful person attracted every one's admiration, while his amiable disposition and engaging manners gained him an interest in every generous heart. George Worthington loved him with all the ardour of youthful friendship, while a noble emulation filled his breast with a desire to imitate one whose conduct was so praiseworthy. Henry, on his part, was not backward in testifying his regard for his young companion, who,

while he diligently pursued the usual routine of studies at school, derived an increased stock of knowledge from the private instructions of his friend.

Mrs. Worthington could not but acknowledge these advantages, and she endeavoured to promote the growing attachment between them.

The dispositions of the two boys were nevertheless different: in George there glowed some of that love of worldly distinction, of which, in spite of Mrs. Worthington's dereliction from her family prejudices, she was not entirely divested. She loved to talk of the consequence of her family, and her children naturally imbibed some idea of pride of birth. This was certainly a great weakness in Mrs. Worthington's character: she did not consider that young minds are apt to form very erroneous notions on

the distinctions of rank and affluence ; and, instead of cherishing that contentment, which alone can constitute a happy life, the seeds of ambition were thus early introduced ; and George could not suppress an occasional regret that he too was not chosen by his grandfather to partake of the family honours. He was intended for the army, and already panted to acquit himself in the field in such a manner as would ensure him a protector in his grandfather : but these sentiments always yielded to the ties of affection and the voice of friendship.

Henry Maitland had mixed very little in society : with his earliest rudiments of education he had imbibed a belief in superstitious traditions ; and surrounded by those, with whom such stories are popular, they had acquired an interest in his heart, which his riper years vainly endeavoured to eradicate ; for though he

frequently flattered himself that he had completely subdued such puerile fancies, yet now and then, some accidental circumstance would occur to call forth his early prejudices, and convince him that such impressions once made, however they may be condemned and ridiculed in cool judgment, are seldom entirely effaced.

From the style of books too, which Henry was fond of reading, his mind had received a romantic turn ; and, as it generally happens with persons of this description, he felt anxious to rise above the calm pursuits of common life ; he longed to imitate those heroes of romance, whose characters he delighted to contemplate, and whose virtues he determined to copy.

His mother had been equally silent to him as she had been to her inquisitive

neighbours, and always excused herself when he attempted to lead the conversation to her former connexions, by expressing the great distress which a revival of past melancholy events, would occasion her; at the same time giving him hopes that at some future period he should be made acquainted with every circumstance relating to him and his family.

A sort of mystery was perceivable to Henry, in the disclosure being thus protracted: this, he cherished, and now desisted from questioning his mother on the subject, lest she might make such a disclosure as would destroy his romantic hopes.

In the choice of a profession none seemed so congenial to his character as that of a soldier; and as George Worthington had already declared his predilec-

tion for the army, the two friends looked forwards to sharing a career of glory together.

Mrs. Maitland had judged it proper to give her son a more general knowledge of the manners of the world, before he commenced his military profession, and he was accordingly sent to a public school at a considerable distance from home, where George promised himself the pleasure of joining his friend as soon as his father returned home. In the meantime, under the excellent tuition of Mr. Shirley, and pursuing those habits of industry which Henry's example had recommended, George became a good classical scholar.

Captain Worthington's professional duty had been protracted, and on his wife's receiving letters from him, containing this unwelcome information, she no

longer opposed her son's wish of going to ———, where the advantages of such a friend as Henry Maitland were so manifest.

CHAP. III.

HENRY had completed his nineteenth year, when he received intelligence that Mrs. Maitland lay dangerously ill: he lost not a moment in hastening to Aberfowey, but when at about twenty miles distance from home, and at the end of a long stage, he had the mortification to learn that no horses were to be had; he endeavoured to restrain his impatience till the jaded animals, which had brought him the last stage, had rested sufficiently to proceed, when a traveller, who had for some time earnestly regarded him,

having learnt his distress, benevolently offered his horse. Henry thankfully accepted his proposal, and was anxious to set off that moment; but he found the stranger expected his curiosity to be gratified in return for the favor he had done him : he inquired Henry's name and place of residence; whether his father were living, whether he resembled him; and having obtained all the satisfaction Henry could give, he added that he had known a gentleman to whom Henry bore a very strong resemblance, but he was of a different name.

Henry's curiosity was now roused, and he in his turn began to make inquiries; but here he was disappointed: the stranger was cautious in his replies, and Henry collected nothing of any consequence from him. His appearance bespoke him to be in respectable circumstances, though of an inferior rank of

life; he appeared to be about sixty years of age, and of a grave and thoughtful aspect.

Had Henry met the stranger at any other time, he would have used every effort in his power to unravel the mystery, which seemed to be connected with the inquiries which had been made of him: his early fondness for romantic adventures made him regard the traveller with more than common interest, and he felt dejected at the idea of leaving him without having been able to learn something more of him, or any clue by which he might hear of him again; it had been agreed that the horse was to be returned to the inn, where it was to remain till the stranger sent for it: this was the only circumstance which afforded Henry a hope of gaining some further information respecting him.

The horse being ready, Henry again thanked his friend for his kindness, and hastened on his journey: it was now late in the evening, and as Henry was anxious to reach home as soon as possible, a nearer way had been described to him; this proved to be somewhat intricate, and owing to the darkness of the evening he mistook the directions. His mind now became more agitated, anticipating the fatal termination of his mother's illness, and fearful of arriving too late; then advertng to the singular appearance and inquiries of the stranger, his ideas became bewildered; and undecided which way to direct his course, his horse carried him many miles out of the direct road, and brought him into a wild and desolate part of the country.

The day had been extremely sultry, and the aspect of the south foretold the

approaching storm: slight flashes of lightning had passed unheeded, but as the evening darkened, the lightning appeared more vivid; the thunder rolled in tremendous peals, and large drops of rain were now followed by a heavy torrent. Henry's horse took fright, and carried him through an irregular wood before he could overcome the violence of the animal's speed. The trees were but thinly scattered, and Henry, weary and dejected, endeavoured to seek some more sheltered situation, when he discovered some ruins at no great distance. Upon a nearer approach, they appeared to be the remains of an abbey, and he soon found an archway which afforded him shelter from the rain: the flashes of lightning followed each other so rapidly, that he was enabled to form a better idea of the building, and fastening his horse to a tree which grew among the

ruins, he sought a place of greater security; when suddenly, a deep groan arrested his attention, and at the same instant his eyes glanced upon a tall figure enveloped in a dark cloak. The lonely hour, the disturbed state of the elements, and the cloistered scene around him, aided by his own feverish imagination, inspired Henry with superstitious awe towards the being before him, and for a time combated the impulse of humanity which prompted him to offer a succouring hand to a fellow-creature in distress. The groans increased, but proceeded from a greater distance——Henry listened with breathless attention to discover the direct spot.

The lightning was now more faint, the thunder died away in distant murmurs, and the rain ceased—a few stars appeared, and the moon occasionally

breaking through the clouds, penetrated the gloomy recesses of the ruin, and enabled the agitated Henry to explore its various avenues, which were so entangled by wild shrubs and choked up with broken masses of the building, that it was with difficulty he forced his way towards the sounds which had excited in him such mixed sensations of horror and pity.

His way became more intricate as he pursued the remote windings of the ruin;—the sounds were now heard no more: a solemn stillness prevailed, interrupted only by the wind lightly murmuring through the avenues, and the drippings of the rain from the ivied turrets; but Henry felt impelled to discover the cause of those strange sounds he had heard: looking around him, he observed a low door-way, which com-

municated with a flight of steps; having with some difficulty descended, he proceeded through a winding passage to a small low room, which he had scarcely entered, when, by the glimmering light which penetrated through the broken ceiling, he perceived on the ground, stretched before him, the mysterious form which had so fearfully excited his curiosity. His blood ran cold---all his early superstition assailed him, and for awhile deterred him from approaching the awful object before him;---at length, yielding to an irresistible impulse of curiosity, he advanced;---the dark mantle concealed every part---his whole frame became violently agitated as he tremblingly raised it, to view the supernatural being beneath---a convulsive terror overcame him at the sight of the object that now presented itself---and he fell senseless on the ground.

As soon as he recovered, he hurried out of the mysterious cell, and retracing his steps, he soon gained the outer court.

The grey tints of morning now began to disclose the eastern horizon, and Henry soon perceived his horse, which had found some herbage growing among the loose stones. Henry mounted, and darting a fearful look behind him, rode swiftly from the ruin.

After having pursued his way through the wood for some time without meeting with any vestige of a human creature, he at length discovered something like a path; this he followed, and presently the curling smoke from a wood-cutter's cottage, conducted him to an inhabited spot. Having learnt that he was at a considerable distance from the road he

was in quest of, he had no difficulty in procuring the wood-cutter's son as a guide, and hoping to learn some particulars respecting the ruin, he began questioning the boy on the subject ; the ignorance of his companion, however, baffled his curiosity, and all he could collect for a certainty, was, that nobody ever went near the place, as it was reported to be haunted.

As soon as they came in sight of the road, Henry hastened on, and reached home about mid-day. He was dreadfully shocked to hear that his mother had been given over, and that she now lay at the point of death. He tremblingly opened the door of her apartment, and felt quite overcome at the melancholy sight before him. When he had last taken leave of his mother she was in good health, and retained a con-

siderable portion of that beauty for which she had been once so much admired: what a contrast did her present condition exhibit! her wasted form and pallid countenance;—her eyes half closed, and sunk in her head; all bespoke the solemn change that now awaited her.

As soon as she understood who was in the room, she made signs for him to draw nearer:—she grasped his hand, and in feeble but expressive accents, exclaimed, “Oh Henry! you have much to forgive---I have greatly injured you: ---but all I have is your’s.”——She now seemed struggling for breath to disclose the secret which weighed so heavily on her last moments—then fixing her glazy eyes upon him, she with difficulty uttered, “I am not your mother!” She made another effort to speak, but could

only articulate “ *Mortimer*,” and expired.

It is impossible to describe the effect of this event on the mind of Henry. The adventure in the ruin appeared to him like a vision intended to prepare him for the shock he had just experienced ; and from the stranger’s inquiries at the inn, he felt an unconquerable conviction that there was a mystery hanging over him.

The melancholy duties which he had now to perform, in some degree drew his mind from these romantic reveries ; but he determined to make diligent inquiry after the person who had appeared so interested about him.


Henry felt various conflicting emotions at the death of one who had always conducted herself towards him as

a fond mother, but whose last words avowed her an impostor : he endeavoured to palliate the offence, and to account for the motives ; but the mystery seemed fathomless, and his mind harrassed by fruitless enquiries, at last yielded to his melancholy impressions.

On George's arrival at Aberfowey, he found his friend much altered both in appearance and manners : abstraction and gloominess had taken place of his cheerful countenance and conversation, and George had considerable difficulty in rousing him from his despondency. He insisted on Henry's quitting Mrs. Maitland's late residence, where every thing tended to add to his painful reflections.

George introduced his friend under his mother's roof, and the time Henry spent there, was made so pleasant, that he

was soon restored to his natural cheerfulness, and he once more appeared as the agreeable companion and elegant scholar. This was a dangerous abode for him: the attractive graces of Ellen Worthington made an irresistible impression on his heart. In the retirement in which she had been educated, Ellen had acquired ideas sufficiently romantic, to make her take a lively interest in all she heard of young Maitland; and a reciprocity of sentiments soon endeared them to each other.

George had now to return to  college, and Henry began to reflect seriously on his future prospects. Mrs. Maitland had accumulated considerable savings of her income, which she bequeathed to Henry, and it became necessary that he should go to London, to have an interview with her agent, from

whom it was not unlikely he might obtain some information respecting himself.

It would be difficult to describe the various sensations Henry felt on quitting Aberfowey ; but it must not be forgotten that in taking leave of Ellen Worthington, he seemed to bid adieu to every thing worth possessing. His high sense of honour would not permit him, circumstanced as he was, to make his passion known to her : that she was dear to him, he felt she must be convinced ; and he determined to use every means in his power to trace his origin, and if the result proved satisfactory, to declare his affection.

Soon after Henry's arrival in town, he wrote his friend, stating that his enquiries had been of little avail, but that he had gained some very distant traces,

and intimating, that as it was probable he should have occasion to visit the continent, it might be a long time before George heard from him again.

CHAP. IV.

THE time drew near, when Captain Worthington was anxiously expected home, after having been several years on a foreign station, enduring many hardships, with little prospect of enriching himself. Mrs. Worthington had received letters from him, stating the very day the fleet was to sail and the probable time of their meeting. Alas ! they were to meet no more !—a fever broke out in his ship, and Captain Worthington fell a victim to the contagion.

What a blow was this for his affec-

tionate wife. George was at ——— college when the fatal news reached him: he loved his father with ardour and deplored his loss with the sincerest sorrow. He hastened home to comfort his afflicted mother, whom he found dissolved in tears, while his eldest sister was bending over her, and the little Sophy sitting by her kissing her hand.

What an affecting scene! could her father have been a witness to her distress, his stern heart must have yielded to the emotions of nature;—but he had already decided what part to act. The object of his unjust hatred was no more, and he could now extend his arms towards his daughter, without enduring the mortification of witnessing her attachment to the illegitimate offspring of an infamous mother.

In narrow minds, the innocent child

is regarded with almost an equal abhorrence as its guilty parent, and though Mr. Bolingbroke was a man of extensive learning and honorable sentiments, his deep-rooted pride of birth made him regard the presumption of Captain Worthington in aspiring to Miss Bolingbroke as an injury he could never forgive.

'Tis true, Worthington's mother had been early abandoned to vice. She had artfully seduced Captain Worthington's father when very young, and leaving to his care their unfortunate offspring, she forsook them both, carrying off with her every thing she could turn to her advantage, and was supposed to have gone abroad; no tidings having since been heard of her.

Her early profligate life had been so notorious, that her son was brought up in ignorance respecting his parents. His

father left him under the care of a relation, with directions for entering him at a proper age on board a man of war: his orders were obeyed, and the young midshipman soon distinguished himself for British intrepidity.

Though his birth had been thus kept secret, certain whispers had gone abroad casting disgraceful reflections on his name. His messmates could talk of their parents and numerous relatives; while Augustus felt himself an isolated being: of his mother, he knew nothing; he retained but a faint recollection of the parting interview with his father, and entertained but little hope of ever seeing him again, as it was at this time doubtful whether he were in existence.

However painful his private reflections were, Augustus disregarded the ungenerous taunts of his companions, and leav-

ing them to enjoy reputations derived from their ancestors, he was determined to gain a reputation for himself. Opportunity favored his laudable endeavours; but his successes kindled envy and enmity among his comrades; and one of them having gained a pretty accurate account of his origin, made no scruple of spreading the report; and when Augustus had the good fortune to meet the beautiful Adelaide Bolingbroke, his rivals were busy whispering in her ear the tale of his disgraceful birth. Adelaide regarded it not, but her father thundered his vengeance: his threats however were in vain; and Worthington carried off his prize.

Adelaide had never seen her father since that eventful day; and he had vowed never to see her while the object of his resentment lived.

As soon as Mr. Bolingbroke heard of the untimely death of the unfortunate Augustus, he invited his daughter and her family to his house. She set out for the mansion of her ancestors with a heavy heart. What indescribable sensations filled her mind, as her eyes encountered objects so familiar, so dear to her recollection! When she entered an apartment that had been her mother's, overcome by her emotions she sat down and gave way to her tears: here she had experienced all the tenderness of an ever-regretted mother, rendered doubly soothing from the austerity of her father: here, a variety of memorials revived the scenes of her infant happiness, and the reflections to which they gave rise, occasioned her a melancholy retrospection of events which had since occurred; but these impressions were of short duration; Mrs. Worthington's attention was called to a variety of arrangements necessary

for the accommodation of herself and family, at Bolingbroke Court, and by degrees she felt capable of enjoying the consequence of her new situation.

On quitting Aberfowey, George took leave of Mr. Shirley with many earnest professions of regard; assuring him that it should not be long before he paid a visit to his respected friend. There was another person however, whom George secretly had in view, when he thought of revisiting Aberfowey.

Maria Shirley was about two years older than George Worthington: the sweetness of her disposition, with no inconsiderable share of beauty, had early awakened in George's breast the tenderest emotions, which as he grew older, had ripened into a sincere attachment.

It was impossible for Maria to be ig-

norant of the impression she had made ; but her good sense naturally led her to reflect seriously on the consequences of encouraging an attachment so little likely to meet the approbation of his friends.

Their parting interview was short and somewhat embarrassing: George took her hand, and imprinting on it a kiss, as he tremblingly relinquished it, assured her, that whatever might be his future prospects, he should ever cherish with fond remembrance the happy days he had spent at Aberfowey. Maria could not restrain her tears : George begged her to be more composed, and as he bade her farewell, he added in the tenderest accents, “ I shall never forget you.”

Mr. Bolingbroke’s property, independently of the family estate, was amply sufficient to enrich all his grandchildren;

and he now derived considerable gratification in contemplating the rank they would hold in society. Arthur was of course his heir, and had already assumed his name. It was his desire that George should complete his education at Oxford; and he looked forward, at no very distant period, to his filling a seat in parliament. Ellen was attended by the first masters; he signified his intention that she should be presented at court: and hoping to wipe away the stain his family had received from the degrading marriage of his own daughter, he began considering of proper alliances for his grand-daughters, while the little Sophy still retained a violent attachment for her wax-doll.

Mrs. Worthington had not been long settled at Bolingbroke Court, before her eldest son arrived. George was ready to rush into his brother's arms, while the courtly Arthur, extending his hand,

swore he was rejoiced to see him, and was glad the old gentleman was going to do the thing handsomely.

With no restraint on his temper or conduct, no one will be surprized to hear that a boy, naturally of an impatient, though generous disposition, grew up extravagant, dissipated, and self-willed. Arthur Bolingbroke added one more to the list of promising boys, whose maturer years have occasioned disappointment and regret to their too sanguine friends.

Towards the approach of winter, Mr. Bolingbroke consulted Mrs. Worthington about her establishment in town; a handsome house was taken in Manchester-Square, and furnished in the most expensive style. About a month after Christmas, the family arrived in town, and Mrs. Worthington soon found herself

encircled by a numerous acquaintance; she was not of a character to distinguish between real and disinterested friendship, and did not perceive, that many of her new friends, while they openly professed a regard for herself, had only in view a participation of her elegant entertainments.

CHAP. V.

Two years elapsed since Mrs. Worthington left Aberfowey, and during that period, George had not been able to perform his promise of paying Mr. Shirley a visit: various pursuits occupied his time, and he had not heard any thing of Mr. Shirley's family for some months. A tender recollection of Maria still played round his heart, but his love was not sufficiently ardent to detach him from the gaieties of the life he now led. Had he known all that Maria had suffered, he would not perhaps have hesitated a mo-

ment in flying to offer every consolation in his power. He knew when he left Aberfowey that Mr. Shirley's health was declining, and he had since heard that there was little prospect of any speedy amendment; but he was ignorant that Maria had so closely attended her father's bed-side, that her health materially suffered from the confinement.

Mr. Shirley being much alarmed on his daughter's account, insisted on her having medical advice: change of air was recommended, and Maria having had frequent invitations from a relation of her mother's to pay a visit to her daughters, who were about Maria's age, Mrs. Shirley was induced to write to Mrs. Meredith on the subject, and a pressing invitation to Swansea was sent to Maria from her cousins.

Mr. Meredith was a respectable mer-

chant; and had gradually risen from an humble situation in life, to his present comparatively affluent circumstances; he was generally so immersed in business, as to have but little time to attend to family affairs, which were therefore left to the management of his wife, who piquing herself upon her genteel connexions, was studious of giving an air of elegance and fashion to their establishment. She valued herself, too, upon her knowledge of the world; and brought up her daughters to despise every thing that belonged to an humble sphere of life. Her object was to procure them husbands of a higher rank than themselves; and no pains were spared to give them every appearance of persons of fashion and consequence.

They were in many respects very different girls from Maria Shirley, and

would not have been selected as companions for her, had not circumstances thus introduced them to each other; and above all, the conviction Mr. Shirley felt that the virtuous principles which he had implanted in his daughter's mind, were proof against any temptations to which she might be exposed. Maria had not suffered shewy accomplishments to engross her care and study, to the exclusion of the more solid branches of education; while the Miss Merediths, though anxious to be considered as very accomplished girls, had paid little attention to the cultivation of the mind: independently however of personal vanity and a love of dissipation, they were extremely good tempered, well-meaning girls, and gave Maria a sincere and hearty welcome.

Maria's health daily improved, and she

could not but be amused with a style of life so perfectly novel to her. Instead of that calm, uniform round of occupations, to which she had been accustomed at Aberfowey, she had now to hear of daily arrivals of persons of distinction ; plans for parties ; imaginary matches and dissertations on fashion ; to the Miss Merediths, these were matters of the most serious importance ; to Maria, they afforded little interest, and were topics she felt very ill qualified to discuss. She could not help thinking what an unfit companion she was for her gay cousins, and how they must wish to have her place filled by a young friend of theirs, whom they constantly took occasion to quote, whenever any subject of taste or fashion was started. This friend, Maria soon learnt was expected with her aunt to pay a short visit at Swansea ; and her curiosity was not a little on tip-toe to see

the person who appeared to be the guiding star to the Miss Merediths.

Harriet Villars was an orphan, and heiress to considerable property: as an only child, she had been thoroughly spoilt in her infancy, by fond but injudicious parents; and when her mother died, she was brought up by Mrs. Daly, her father's sister, who thought it her duty to follow the example of Mr. and Mrs. Villars, and consequently allowed her niece every indulgence.

Accustomed to a will of her own; conscious of very considerable personal attractions, both as to beauty and fortune, Harriet grew up, conceited, vain and selfish: she had a decided passion for high life, and piqued herself upon the novelty of her ideas. She had become acquainted with the Miss Merediths at school, and the notions of these young

ladies, with regard to taste and fashion so perfectly accorded, that they became inseparable friends.

Since they had left school, they had seldom met, but in the intervals, their friendship had been kept up by correspondence, in which, a thirst after a knowledge of the reigning taste, on the part of the Miss Merediths, was obligingly gratified by Miss Villars; so that they were always able to speak on fashionable topics to the wonder of their more retired friends.

Mrs. Daly and Miss Villars had been spending a month at Fenby, and had promised the Miss Merediths to pay them a visit in their way to Bath.

Miss Villars, having mentioned the time she should arrive at Swansea, the Miss Merediths had written to insist on

her coming at once to their house to dinner, and having received no reply, they considered the invitation as accepted.

Mr. Meredith thought it a very inconvenient plan ; and as the dinner hour approached, he began to repent of not having been more firm in opposing it, when first proposed. Four o'clock struck, and Mr. Meredith grew very impatient, continually going out to the door to see whether the expected guests were in sight.

At five o'clock, Mr. Meredith's commands to have the dinner brought up, were no longer opposed, and the family party sat down to a handsome dinner, without much inclination to partake of it : Mr. Meredith regretting the unnecessary expence that had been incurred, and the others, unwilling to relinquish the idea that their friends would still come,

endeavoured as much as possible to protract the repast. At length they were obliged to give up all hope, and to console themselves, seemed determined to do ample justice to the good things before them, when, as the cloth was going to be removed, an elegant travelling carriage, with four post-horses, stopt at the door.

It is impossible to describe the consternation this produced : the dinner was “tumultuously remanded” from the kitchen; the table was cleared, and every one in motion to assist in restoring order.

Mrs. Meredith and her daughters received their visitors in the drawing-room, where an interchange of enquiries took place, while preparations were made for their reception in the dining-room. Mrs. Daly made a thousand apologies for be-

ing so much after the time, and insisted that she and her niece had taken refreshment on the road; but nothing would do, and they were forced into the parlour, where the ghost of the intended dinner appeared in all the horror of remnants neither hot nor cold, of fish, flesh and fowl. Mrs. Daly renewed her protestations of having made quite a dinner on the road, which, by a glance to her niece were supported on her part; however to oblige her friends she consented to take a little ham.

Mr. Meredith expatiated on the fineness of the fish; while his lady was sure Mrs. Daly could not make a dinner, and desired the servants to see whether there was not some of the pigeon pie left. "I don't think there is," said Mr. Meredith, "at least nothing worth speaking of; for if you recollect, my dear, you said it need

not be put by; but there was a good deal of the hash, or *ragout* as you called it."

Mrs. Meredith silenced him with her looks; and his daughters endeavoured to turn the discourse, by adverting to the gaieties of Tenby. Maria was much amused with this novel scene, and as she could take no part in a conversation about persons and places, to which she was a perfect stranger, she had leisure to study the appearance and manners of these fashionable visitors.

Mrs. Daly appeared a fine shewy woman about five and 'forty; she wore a deep black lace veil, which was turned up in front, but hanging 'down at the sides, shaded her rouged cheeks. She talked with much vivacity; used a great deal of action in her conversation, and altogether gave Maria the idea of a

French-woman. But however novel Mrs. Daly's manners were to Maria, she was infinitely more amazed at the style of Miss Villars: it appeared extraordinary to Maria, that she should so early in life, have acquired a singularity of deportment, and a manner of expressing herself so unlike any thing she had hitherto seen: indeed the Miss Merediths themselves seemed to be surprised. Some of her sallies of pleasantry (for they seldom amounted to wit,) were sometimes almost incomprehensible, though Mrs. Daly never failed to laugh violently, exclaiming at the same time "you *odd* creature!" and Maria now knew, to what source to attribute some expressions which had before struck her as singular in her cousins.

The Miss Merediths having proposed some plans for spending the time pleasantly, while their friends were with

them, Mrs. Daly began earnestly lamenting that their time was so limited, it would be absolutely impossible for them to trespass on the kind hospitality of their dear friends longer than the next day.

It was evident to Maria, that Mrs. Daly and her niece had no wish to prolong their visit; and as it appeared so much their settled plan to proceed on their journey, the Miss Merediths were obliged to desist from entreating them to stay. A party, however, was made the following morning for Britton Ferry, which proved a pleasanter excursion than Mrs. Daly expected: they returned to dinner about five o'clock, and Mrs. Meredith had the satisfaction of setting before her guests a dinner in a more comfortable style than that on the preceding day.

In the afternoon, the four young ladies

were sitting near the drawing-room window, when three gentlemen attracted the notice of the Miss Merediths, who observed they must be some new arrivals.

Miss Villars applied her glass, but did not venture to pronounce her sentiments on their merits at such a distance : as they approached nearer, she was more decisive in her opinion ; “ nothing in them, I fear—I don’t see an amiable trait about them ; observe, they absolutely passed that smart girl without a remark ; I really don’t think they even stared at her, when you know, Eliza, unless a man stares a pretty girl out of countenance he cannot be an agreeable creature—one that you would like to flirt with ; the thing’s impossible :” and as the gentlemen were now very near, she continued, “ I hear nothing like a fashionable expression escape them ; not even the embellishment of a stylish oath

or two—no, positively, I cannot discover an amiable trait about them.”

Nothing amiable ! thought Maria, what a perversion of language ! but as the gentlemen passed, she distinguished that though they were neither *so fashionable as to insult an unprotected female, nor to garnish their conversation with oaths*, yet there was one among them, whom neither absence, nor the improbability of his entertaining for her any regard beyond that which their juvenile acquaintance had established, could disengage from her heart. She was perplexed at his sudden appearance, and as she mused upon the circumstance, she was rallied by her companions on having lost her heart to one of the strangers, and opinions were started respecting the happy man.

Maria was little practised in parrying

an attack of this sort, and blushing deeply at the consciousness that her thoughts had really been occupied with the unexpected appearance of George Worthington, she was unable to account for her confusion, and consoled herself that it evidently passed for shyness, and the result of a retired education.

A walk on the Burrows was proposed after tea, and it being a fine evening, a good deal of company were assembled. The three gentlemen were soon observed approaching, and Maria, full of anxiety, waited the result of the meeting with a palpitating heart.

George instantly recognized her, and separating himself from his party, was at her side in an instant. He informed her, he had only arrived that morning, and intended proceeding the next day to pay Mr. Shirley a visit at Aberfowey, where,

added he, lowering his voice, "I expected to have had the pleasure of seeing *you*."

Maria thanked him for his kind remembrance of them, and gave him a brief account of her father's illness; and slightly noticing her own, said she came to Swansea for change of air.

This was sufficient to awaken George's early attachment: he felt how neglectful he had been, and various expressions dropt from him, which the susceptible heart of Maria cherished as assurances of his returning affection.

The Miss Merediths having been introduced to Mr. Worthington, invited him to spend the evening at their house, and Miss Villars, in spite of her former verdict, pronounced him a very supportable companion.

Instead of proceeding to Aberfowey, as he had intended, George continued at Swansea beyond a week : every day afforded him opportunities of being in Maria's company, and every hour increased her power over his heart : but in his intercourse with society, he had learnt some worldly wisdom. He was at present wholly dependent on his grand-father, and he was well aware he must relinquish every prospect of sharing his fortune, if he married without his consent : he would not therefore enter into engagements which circumstances might put it out of his power to fulfil : he imposed a restraint on his feelings ; offered no attentions to Maria beyond what their old acquaintance warranted, and left her without making any declaration of the tender sentiments he entertained.

CHAP. V.

GEORGE had so much overstayed his time at Swansea, that he could only give Mr. Shirley a hurried visit, and then hastened to join his family at Mr. Bolingbroke's in Staffordshire.

Miss Villars and her aunt had also left Swansea, and as one of the Miss Merediths was going in a short time to Clifton, with Mr. and Mrs. Jones, friends of her father, Maria was prevailed on to prolong her visit.

This excursion to Clifton had been the subject of much conversation be-

tween the young ladies, while Miss Villars had been with them, as she had been there several times, and could give an account of the company and amusements of the place.

Ah, thought Elizabeth, but you were there with all the advantage of equipage, and the *eclat* of a beautiful heiress ; I have to appear in the capacity of a useful companion to a worthy couple who are going for a little change of scene, and to see some old friends at Bristol. These friends had formerly been concerned in business with Mr. Jones ; and Elizabeth anticipated no gay parties ; no driving in barouches ; no dashing beaux to give her consequence : but still a removal from home was desirable, and her sanguine wishes held out hopes that she would find it pleasanter than she expected. She possessed a great share of personal beauty, of which she was thoroughly

aware, and having received a new stock of ideas of fashion from her friend Harriet, she considered it not quite impossible that, instead of returning home as humble Miss Meredith, she might set off for Bath or Cheltenham in a dashing carriage, as the blooming bride of some man of fashion, family, and fortune.

In the mean time, the Miss Merediths began to disclose a secret to Maria which had for some time been the subject of their private conferences.

“ You must know, my dear,” said Elizabeth, “ we are longing to give a dance ; and we’ve been thinking how to bring it about.”

“ Mamma is very willing,” observed her sister, “ but my father doesn’t know any thing about it yet ; and we have been thinking, that now you are come, he

would have no objection ; just to make your visit a little pleasant, you know.”

Maria began to feel herself placed in an awkward predicament ; she considered that Mr. Meredith was the proper person to decide whether this party ought to be given ; yet her cousins would of course require her influence to second the object they had in view.

Mr. Meredith appearing in a cheerful humour after supper, his daughters exchanged a wink, and immediately began a concerted plan for introducing the subject. The piano forte was in the room, and Elizabeth passing by it, as if by accident, ran over a few notes of a country-dance : this produced a discussion upon tunes, and Mrs. Meredith expressed her regret that they had not been to one dance, while Miss Shirley had been with them.

“ Suppose,” said Elizabeth, “ we were to make up a little hop ; just a few friends to drink tea, and take it by turns to play on the piano forte.”

“ Well ’twould be very pleasant, I’m sure,” said her mother, “ and Mr. Meredith would have no objection, I dare say, to please the young people ; we were once young ourselves, and liked these sort of things as well as any body.”

Mr. Meredith had a sort of prophetic apprehension, grounded on experience, that if he said A, he must learn to say B ; he therefore paused a moment before he replied.

“ Dear papa now,” exclaimed Fanny, “ what objection can you possibly have to a little sociable party, while my cousin is here ; just to make her visit a little pleasant.”

“ I’ve no objection to a *little* party,” said Mr. Meredith, “ only I’m fearful you will go on from one thing to another, till you invite all your acquaintance, for fear of giving offence.”

“ Oh, no we sha’n’t. We’ll just ask a few friends in an off-hand way.”

A consultation now followed respecting the day, which was at length agreed on, and a few *cards of invitation* were immediately written to fix the plan. This was the first innovation on the proposed *off-hand* party.

The following day, the ladies met together to talk over the matter, and a list being produced of the company to be invited, it was discovered that it would be necessary to ask a great many more than were at first thought of. When the list was shewn to Mr. Meredith, he

said, he knew how it would be; they would never be contented till they had their rooms as full as they would hold.

“ Dear me !” cried his wife, “ you’re always so fidgetty about having too many. Why ’tis what people like ; ’tis nothing without a cram.”

“ Well, I think it’s very ridiculous,” said Mr. Meredith, “ to crowd these small rooms.”

“ Never mind ; do let us, for once, have a little of our own way ; it’s very hard, if we *are* to give a dance, that one can’t do the thing a little like other people.”

“ What other people do,” returned Mr. Meredith, “ is no rule for us. Are we to do this thing, and t’other thing, because other people are fools enough to spend their money in such trifles.”

“ Why, Mr. Meredith, how you talk ; one would think you were going to be ruined, by having a little party, and just standing up to dance ; and now Miss Shirley is here, we thought to make it pleasant to her, just to have a little dance—”

“ Well, have n’t I consented, I only advised you not to crowd your rooms.”

A hint or two respecting a supper came from Mrs. Meredith, and her husband not appearing to object, his consent was taken for granted ; and in the next meeting of the ladies, *a ball and supper* fully entered into their views : the idea of the piano forte for the music had vanished, and violins and a harp were now considered indispensable. Miss Meredith proposed decorating the arch in the hall with evergreens, interspersed with a few roses, which, she said, she could make herself. Mrs. Meredith

agreed that it would look very pretty, and Elizabeth whispered to her sister, "how easy it would be just to have the floor chalked."

"And you could have a few geraniums and myrtles placed about," added Mrs. Meredith, "'tis what one sees at fashionable houses, and 'twould be pleasant for Mrs. Markham and the Stapyltons to see that we understand these sort of things."

"I was thinking," said Elizabeth, "we could get Spencer Vaughan to bring some smart men; perhaps he'd ask Mr. Torrens: he's such an elegant young man."

"'Tis very awkward," observed Mrs. Meredith, "that we must be asking all Mr. Meredith's relations; I'm sure I'm always willing to treat them with all due civility at proper times, but I *do*

say it's very hard one can't give *one* party without having them: it spoils every thing. And they're sure never to be engaged."

" Couldn't we contrive to pay them the compliment of an invitation, but in such a manner as may induce them to decline coming."

" I'm sure I don't know how that's to be done," said Fanny, " I know they'll look hideously delighted, and

say, " we won't disappoint you."

" Couldn't you go with a message," said Mrs. Meredith, " and say something about our rooms being small, but if it will be any amusement to them—"

" What's the use," cried Elizabeth, " to go on planning; I *know* they'll be at the party; and I shall have to see that odious old plum-coloured gown;

so make up your minds, we shall have the whole set of them."

"And how vexing that will be," cried Mrs. Meredith, "for my genteel company, to see such a vulgar looking person at our house, as Mrs. Dowling; and her daughters, such quizzes."

"I don't so much care for the female part of the family," observed Miss Meredith despondingly, "'tis the male wretches that tarnish a party; instead of having a set of fashionable looking young men, tall, gentlemanly figures, we must be having the Prattens and Dowlings, detestable!"

"Those Dowlings are so short and vulgarly grown;" added Elizabeth,—
"their clothes evidently made by a country tailor—and then, they ask ladies to dance they are not acquainted with; so *awfully* ill-bred, as Harriet would say: and they dance so hor-

ridly! Then that Dick Pratten is so *awkwardly* tall; like a warp'd mop-stick; and such low manners; with his '*Here's your works! fine doings! who but we!*' —infamous."

"What can be done," sighed Mrs. Meredith. "Then they know nobody, and I'm of course obliged to speak to them every now and then, that they might not feel slighted. And let me tell you, it's very disagreeable to see Mrs. Dowling sitting up watching every thing that's going forward, as if she was calculating the expense; not considering how pleasant we can make a party, but what's the good of it. I can see through her looks and meanings when she praises my arrangements, and concludes with, '*You must have had a great deal of trouble.*' I almost wish we weren't going to give the party."

"I'm sure I wouldn't mind her,"

said Elizabeth, "it will go off very well, I have no doubt."

"Then 'tis so odd, Mrs. Pratten *will* fancy it incumbent on her to talk to people she doesn't know, by way of making up for any deficiency on my part; she gives hints to the servants; and officiously goes about hoping people have had refreshments, and are well accommodated; so that the company can't help seeing she's one of the family."

"Dreadful!" uttered the two sisters.

In spite, however, of all the anticipated mortifications, their exertions for the ball were prosecuted with unremitting assiduity: every day introduced some new arrangements, either without Mr. Meredith's knowledge, or with his extorted consent.

At length the day arrived, and Maria might have exclaimed, "Confusion now

hath done its masterpiece;" for even she, who had been permitted to know most of their plans, was not aware of the multiplicity of business, that was to be executed on this important day.

From breakfast time till evening, an uninterrupted succession of proposals, suggestions, orders, and counter-orders took place, and seemed to threaten no final decision in their arrangements. Mrs. Meredith's voice was heard in every part of the house, in all the variety of vexation, anger, entreaty, and despair.

Many mistakes were made by persons hired to assist, which called forth Mrs. Meredith's wrath. "Why now, who placed this girandole here?" cried she; "'tis to be in the back parlour."

"'Twill do very well, where 'tis;" observed one of her sons.

“ I say, I’ll have it down,” continued Mrs. Meredith ; “ I won’t have this old fashioned, nasty, ugly, gilded thing here; nobody, now, has such a thing in their house——frightful! Oh, here, where, what’s become of the jelly-shapes ; I had ’em here this minute ; somebody has been and taken them away :—fetch me a towel :—nobody goes to the door, and the bell has been ringing this half hour ;—do say we aren’t at home.”

“ Has any one ordered the French rolls ?” screams a voice from an upper chamber.

“ Here’s an apology come from Mr. Dashwood ! was ever any thing so provoking !—Who has left all these things here ?” continued Elizabeth.

“ Why, ’twas I,” said Mrs. Meredith, “ I placed them there on purpose, to look like fashionable litters :—why law now, didn’t you say that the room

oughtn't to look as if it had been made tidy for company, but just the same as it was every day, and that at Lady Rossiter's there were all sorts of things about——”

“ To be sure I did ; but there's a little difference I've a notion, between her elegant nick-knacks and the medley of odd things you have collected together : such an inkstand as that is quite ridiculous !”

“ Well then, take it all away ; I thought you'd have liked it——I don't know what you'd have, you fret one out of one's very life !——law look here, I can't make these candles stay upright do what I will:—where's the lemonade glasses ? I put 'em all out on purpose. Nobody is to go into that room, where the sweet things are.—Has the man been here about putting up the lights ?—Did I leave the key of the little cup-board—

do look on the side-board—I *must* have left it somewhere. I don't know one thing I'm about—here's all your festoons of flowers to be done now."

From the anxiety and confusion which attended the preparations for this entertainment, Maria anticipated no great enjoyment of the party itself: her cousins were so fatigued with their day's work, that when they retired to their rooms to dress, they seemed much more inclined to retire for the night.

Notwithstanding the uncommon pains which had been taken to make their dance remarkable, the entertainment passed off with the sameness of other parties; and when the company had all taken leave, Mrs. Meredith and her daughters, with jaded spirits, seemed to feel in no wise repaid for the fatigue they had undergone. Various vexations, too, had occurred to embitter the evening,

in which the Dowlings and Prattens had contributed their full share: a favorite beau had never made his appearance; a lady of fashion had gone away before supper; and the dancing, they fancied, had not been kept up with spirit. A variety of regrets and reprimands passed between them, in which their irritated feelings made them lose sight of the good-breeding which so much distinguished them in company.

“How stupid you were at supper,” said Miss Meredith to her brother; “you never exerted yourself as other young men do, to make things go off pleasantly.”

“I’m sure I did what I could.”

“No you didn’t, you sat up without saying a word.”

“ Well,” said Elizabeth, “ that was better than his telling Miss Vaughan, how we had been *fussing* all day.”

“ Oh, that was a joke,” said her brother.

“ No very pleasant joke to *us*, let me tell you,” retorted Miss Meredith, her voice faltering, and tears threatening; “ and then Mrs. Dowling immediately began *puffing* us off, saying, how well we had managed every thing, and what clever girls we were; for we had made all the sweet things ourselves. Spencer Vaughan was by; so mortifying! she meant it for him.”

“ Law!” cried Elizabeth, “ we never remembered the mottos! and there they are now up in my room; and I paid five and sixpence for them out of my own pocket.”

“ Well, there, that can’t be helped,” said Meredith ; “ but wasn’t *this* vexing, Mrs. Markham wouldn’t play cards when I asked her, and could have put her at the table with the new packs ; and afterwards she sat down with Major Dawson at the lower table with one clean and one old pack---then to hear their wit about the *experienced* pack, and the cards that were so *well grounded* in the game : how provoking of her to go away before supper ! one would think she did it on purpose to plague one.”

“ And how late all the smart men came,” said Miss Meredith, “ and I couldn’t get them to dance, do what I would ; and there Mr. Torrens never came after all.”

“ Oh, I should be glad to know,” said Elizabeth, “ whose bright thought it was to introduce Mr. Champneys to

Rebecca Dowling? I could have cried my eyes out."

"Why, when he came there was no other lady disengaged, so my father must think it mighty clever to get him to dance with that fright; and what's worse, when he apologised for coming so late, she, by way of being facetious, said, with her nasty lisp, if he had come much later he would not have been in time for the *grand thupper* there was to be. This was of course a high joke to him, for when he sat next Mrs. Stapylton, I heard him ask her what part of the *grand* supper she took a fancy to."

"Well, I think," said Edward Meredith, "every thing was very nice at supper, except the raspberry-cream : I'm afraid it was a little sour."

"Yes, and that was the *only* thing

Mrs. Stapylton chose ; she just tasted it, and not one thing else could I get her to take, do what I would, as if she was afraid of being poisoned---and those Dowlings were just opposite to her ; making such vulgar remarks upon the supper ; stupid fools ! wondering what this thing was, and what t'other thing was made of ; and whether 'twas intended to be eaten ; and thinking 'twould be a pity to cut it. I *do* say it was very impertinent in them to push themselves up so high. Worrying creatures !”

“ And did you see that vulgar wretch, Dick Pratten, in turning Miss Stapylton, twirl his long arm over her head, allemande fashion ; I saw her snatch away her hand, as if she had touched a toad.”

“ *I* could tell something,” said a younger brother ; “ I could, I say ;---”

“ Well, what ? you little torment ! ”

“ Why some of those gentlemen that Mr. Spencer Vaughan brought, were talking about the company ; they didn’t know *me* ; and they said, ’twas a villainous mixture, and they wondered where the devil they had all come from ; and then---”

“ Don’t tell me any more ; it’s torture. ”

It was now near the time that Elizabeth Meredith was to set out for Clifton : her wardrobe required considerable additions and embellishments for this jaunt, and her mother and sister freely offered their assistance, and a share of their own stock.

When all the necessary arrangements

were completed, Elizabeth set off with Mr. and Mrs. Jones, in a chaise and pair, with her trunks full of finery, and her heart full of hopes.

The sisters agreed to correspond, and as their letters will give a better insight into their characters, and a more lively picture of passing events, than mere narrative, their correspondence is presented to the world, “warm from the heart, and faithful to its fires.” Every allowance must be made for the unreserved communication and familiar expressions of two sisters; and should the publication of these letters be deemed an unwarrantable liberty, modern examples, it is hoped, may be pleaded as some excuse.

LETTER I.

Clifton, 20th June, 18---

MY DEAR FANNY,

I WROTE you a hasty line last night, to apprise you of our safe arrival: and now I know, as well as if I resided in your heart, that you are longing to have a full, true, and particular account of our adventures; but you can easily imagine the misery of travelling with such a fidgetty, nervous being as our good Mrs. Jones. You know her ways when at home, but her travelling humour you have not yet had the felicity of witness-

ing ; nor had I an idea of what I was to endure, or I never would have been weak enough to have fallen into the scheme. Imagine a person in constant dread of being imposed upon : at every turnpike she exclaimed against the demand, without having the candour to remark the goodness of the roads. On looking over the bill of fare at Cowbridge, she asked the waiter what might be the *probable* charge for a veal cutlet, before she ventured to order it : and at Newport, where we slept, it was ludicrous to observe the anxiety she betrayed, lest her not having perceived the compliment of wax lights till they required snuffing, should subject us to some charge, although the forbidden luminaries had been immediately ordered away. Several circumstances of this sort were truly odious ; while I pictured to myself the superlative pleasure of being at such a place as Clif-

ton, under the auspices of such a companion.

Mr. Jones did not join us till we arrived at Newport, where he had gone the day before to transact some business. He was ready to receive us at the inn, and informed us he had ordered a *nice* supper, of which we were partaking, when I was agreeably startled by the sound of a horn, which I guessed announced the arrival of some dashing men; but Mr. Jones starting up, with his mouth full of raddishes and bread and butter, and I believe I may add young onions, rushes out into the passage, with "what's all this, hey? what's Boney come to town?---Oh," continued he, returning to our room, while one of the gentlemen passed the open door, "'tis only some frolicsome young sparks."

The next morning these frolicsome

young sparks had to witness our *set-out*. They were at breakfast with their window open, and could distinctly hear Mrs. Jones's repeated injunctions to have her little blue band-box put in the chaise, so that it might not not be squatted, as it contained her best bonnet. From occasional fits of laughter from *the sparks*, I guessed we must have contributed to their mirth: presently they all came out, to see a horse that a jockey had brought to the door, and under favour of the important discussion which ensued, our insignificant machine drove off without further animadversion. I collected from their conversation, that they had been at the fête at Tredegar, and that some of them were on their way to Clifton.

We have been this morning lodging-hunting; no very enviable employment,

when the wish is to have pleasant lodgings, without the heart to pay for them : then Mrs. Jones was so perplexed with being told she must pay for rooms for which she has no use ; wondering why a servant's hall must be taken, and going away from the house in the same manner, and with the same affected indifference as when cheapening a bargain, expecting to be called back to have her money taken..

We are at last housed in small lodgings not very far from the Mall, but our house is in a dull situation, and has rather a shabby appearance..

Mrs. Jones has been so busy in unpacking, and getting her things in order, that we have not walked out yet, but we propose taking a stroll after tea on Clifton Hill..

Pray write soon to your affectionate sister,

E. MEREDITH.

Mr. Jones is gone to Bristol, to call on a friend of his, Mr. Hudson. I wonder what sort of bipeds these Hudsons are. Mrs. Jones says they are very *capital* people, and live in a very handsome way ; and she is sure I shall like them : all that goes for nothing.

LETTER II.

Swansea, 27th June, 18---

I WAS much amused, my dear Elizabeth, with your description of the delectable journey with your good Joneses ; and I am sorry to predict that I fear the pleasures of Clifton, will be not a little embittered by their odd ways.

I should have answered your letter sooner, but my time has been entirely taken up with preparations for our dinner to the bride, which took place yesterday in all due form. You know the grand fuss any thing of the kind always makes in our house, and Mrs. Charles Stapleton.

Being quite a stranger, and reported to be so fashionable, &c. you may imagine the commotion, lest every thing should not go off in style. We had a very elegant dinner; but the difficulty was, who to invite to meet the Stapyltons: luckily, our constant resort, the Vaughans, had not left Highgrove, but then we did not owe them a dinner; that point however, was got over, and they were invited, and as we wished to make the party select, we had, besides, only Mr. Dashwood and Mr. Cummins: but who must arrive the day before she was expected, to give us an *agreeable surprise*, as she said, but Aunt Patty! and sillier than ever I think. Nothing to be sure could be more annoying than such a visiter at such a time; nor could a present of a muslin *habit-shirt* induce wicked me to give her a kind welcome. It is the good creature's own work and pattern, and the *hideosity* of it is such, as to make it absolutely impos-

sible that I can ever wear it, should habit-shirt days return. I hate presents when one can't chuse for oneself: she rather wondered, I believe, that I did not wear it at the dinner party, but I flatly told her that it was not the fashion to muffle up; and Mrs. Charles Stapylton fully supported my assertion, for even her shoulders were uncovered. That will give you some idea of her; in addition to which, I have to report, that she is very handsome, tall, and completely fashionable, and must suit Sophia Stapylton exactly; though I rather suspect she has too much of the satirical in her, to be quite agreeable; and Mrs. Vaughan, whom we have always considered a most pleasing woman, and "so much of the lady about her," seemed not a little awed by the manners of the new-comer.

The dinner went off much better than I expected, making allowances for Tho-

mas's blunders. What d'ye think the old varlet did : he gave Mrs. Charles Stapylton a *wiped* knife, though he had been charged over and over again not to commit so foul a sin : and when Mr. Cummins called for beer, he snatched away Spencer Vaughan's glass to replenish it for Mr. Cummins ; and not content with that, the stupid blockhead brought it without a waiter, leaving on the glass, no slight evidence of his having four fingers and a thumb ! If that's not hanging matter, I don't know what is. The man we hired to assist proved an ignoramus ; so the whole burthen fell on Thomas, who had one incessant trot, and was quite short-breathed ; puffing and blowing. Then I had to talk such nonsense to drown Martha's loud whisperings in the hall, with repeated injunctions, that the peas were " to match the harti-chokes," and " the jelly-shape the hupper corner, missus said."

Just at tea-time your letter was brought, and after I had retired to read it, I had to answer a thousand questions. I flattered myself, I had fairly gone through my catechism, when Aunt Patty attracted every eye to her odious pink countenance by saying, (you know her *tones*,) “Don’t she send her love to her poor aunty-panty?” Of course I had to say you did, and to witness Miss Stapylton’s satirical squeezing up of her features, as she looked at her brother; I am afraid he returned the eye-shot ridicule.

Then followed, “Ah I thought Eliza would-n’t forgit me; she used to say, when she was but quite a little thing, that if she was ever to come to be a grand lady, and have fine cloaths and plenty of money, I should always share it with her; now that shewed you know ma’am,” turning to Mrs. Stapylton, and her face beaming with benevolence, making it look execrable, “that shewed a good disposition.”

Mrs. Stapylton assented with a sly glance towards Sophia, but encountering me, her eye returned to its softness and her smile politely resumed its kindness.

I have just received a letter from Edward, who I find has scraped an acquaintance with a son of Sir Edwin Frere, at Tenby; this he hails as a happy omen to his forming good connexions; but alas, I fear our Ned, with all his wishes to become the man of fashion, will never succeed: there is a certain turn in his aspect and style of behaviour that baffles all attempts at being dashing: he hopes however to profit by your visit to Clifton, which he fancies a very gay place, and expects you will give him a few hints.

I perceive I have not said a word of Maria, nor indeed have I, of our worthy old clock; but lest any disrespect should be imputed to me, I will just add, that

the latter is the same useful good old piece of household furniture, as when it told the vulgar hours it passed on my grandfather's stair-case; and the former, the same mild, amiable, good creature you left behind.

E. M.

P. S. I have just heard that Fairford is here: he is with a recruiting party at Carmarthen, so that he will have frequent opportunities of coming to this place—heigho! I don't know what to say to him; it is very evident my father does not approve of his addresses..

LETTER III.

Clifton, 1st July, 18—.

MY Dear Fanny's entertaining letter arrived just in time to rescue me from a fit of the glooms; for we are *very* dull. I felt no regret however at having missed the dinner to the Stapyltons;—one is never repaid for the anxiety one endures on such occasions. I sometimes think, we very much mistake our real happiness by attempting a style of fashion which we must be conscious is not consistent with our general establishment. It is certainly unfortunate to possess ideas of elegance which we cannot put into prac-

tice; but one feels a sort of gratification in letting people see we understand how entertainments should be conducted.

As for Edward, he must be content to wait some time longer, before he gets any hints of fashion from me. I have now been at Clifton above a week, and I seem scarcely got acquainted with the place, and not knowing any one here, makes one feel so out of the world: then to see smart people flit by,—carriages of all descriptions whirling about,—dashing men on horseback—Servants lounging before a door, five or six perhaps in the same livery, &c. &c. all calculated to oppress one with one's own insignificance.

Edward must learn to walk before he can hope to pass for a gentleman; his voice, too, requires tuning; and his head a store of fashionable topics for con-

versation: when he has acquired these important rudiments, he must entertain a consummate good opinion of himself; dress fashionably; and maintain to his last breath, that clothes cannot be made out of London. He must be very knowing about horses; indeed, I know of no subject on which it is so *essential* for him to be well informed; he must give his opinion and sentiments as if his *whole happiness* depended on it. It will also be necessary for him to understand enough of boxing to enter with spirit into a conversation on that *polite* art. As to address, manners, &c. he must learn an easy freedom, an off-hand way, a smack of slang; and study repartee.

I feel so frightfully dull, that I'm afraid the Joneses will observe it, and therefore force all the sprightliness I can muster into my face; which they, poor souls, put down to real delight. They are, I

firmly believe, very desirous of making this excursion as pleasant as possible to me, in their own good way ; and various plans are talked of to insure success. We are to spend a day at Bath, (a place I am dying to see in a proper way) ; then we are to go once to the play, and, perhaps, to the rooms, if we can summon courage enough to encounter the fashionable assemblage of a ball room ; but Mrs. Jones fears her nerves will not be equal to it, and seems to think it quite a sin, for people to go to balls this fine summer time : well then, if it *be* a sin, I must say 'tis one of all others I've the least scruple about.

In walking out this morning, I met one of the gentlemen who alarmed us so much with their horns at Newport. I find he is a Mr. Ponsonby ; the most elegant man I have seen here. I thought he seemed to recognize me ; but it might

be only my fancy. I understand he is to embellish this place for some time.

I have subscribed to the library, and have met with some amusing books. Mrs. Jones is fond of novels, though she never will own it: she won't take a volume, and sit down as if she were in earnest, but she'll dip into one standing up, and go on reading for an hour.

A long list of quality in the arrival-book gave me a flattering idea of the gaiety of the place; I have seen a few of them—the Countess of Harville, Lord and Lady Delmore, Sir Harry Poyntz, the Hon. Mrs. Vivian, Colonel Molyneux, &c. &c. these I had pictured to myself as the most elegant people in the world; imagine my surprize then, on discovering the Countess to be a hideous, superannuated beldam; Lord Delmore

an ideot; and her Ladyship a graft from his dairy. Sir Harry Poyntz, whom I had decided to be all dash, fashion, and whim, proves to be a fat gouty old gentleman, whom I had frequently seen meandering about in a wheel chair. Mrs. Vivian is an eternal church-goer, and dresses like an humble friend. Well, thought I, Colonel Molyneux no doubt is a handsome dashing fellow: he was so once I find, but has been a grandfather these twenty years.

To make up for these disappointments, I find the Harringtons and Dormers most decidedly people of ton. Here is also a Lady Bellinghurst, who is parted from her husband, but is well received every where, and lives in a very stylish manner.

After introducing to you a set of people

I do *not* know, you may perhaps expect to hear of some whom I *do* know; but as it is now so many years since the Joneses lived in Bristol, there are very few of their old acquaintance left: some of them, from *their* account, were, no doubt, very respectable, and of a higher walk than common tradespeople, but their acquaintance is now very limited, and Mr. and Mrs. Hudson appear to be the only persons with whom Mrs. Jones wishes to be on visiting terms: they had been neighbours, and though Mrs. Jones is much her superior, yet convenience and habit established an intimacy between them. We called on this favored couple a day or two after our arrival here, and a few evenings ago they drank tea with us.

Mr. Jones has just informed me that if I am writing home, it is time the letter

should be sent to the post-office; but I cannot let it go in its present mopy state; and shall therefore keep it to add such occurrences as may be worth recording, and I believe I may venture to promise about as much variety, as there is in the chirping of our smoke-jack, when it wants oiling.

I feel I ought to say something about Fairford; but you so well know every thing that I could say on the subject, that it seems almost unnecessary. As I know you are sincerely attached to each other, I can only hope something favorable may turn up, and that every obstacle to your union may be removed.

Monday.

As we understood the band was to play on Clifton Down yesterday evening, it was agreed that we should walk out to hear it. Mrs. Jones was afraid it would rain, and would on no account put on her best bonnet; so she went in a dowdy straw slouch, and perhaps, if any thing, looked genteeler than she would in her best, which is over fine. Mr. Jones carried a large umbrella.

Then an hour before the real fashionables think of making their appearance, *we* would set out, for the band *was* come, and no doubt would begin playing by the time we got there: my telling them 'twas too early was of no kind of use; and unfortunately afforded Mr. Jones an excuse

for indulging an odd fancy he has of going to the top of Clifton Down; and now recollecting 'twas high water, nothing would do, but we must all go and see the ships come up: compliance followed of course, and we had to fatigue ourselves with mounting up to his favorite spot, in order to get the best view of the river, &c.; and now, though the band had struck up, and "Viva Enrico" was wafted in broken parts to our ears, inviting us to a more near enjoyment of this delightful piece of music, nothing could draw him from the spot: the sluggish vessels seemed to be dawdling along on purpose to detain us, while he sought to entertain and edify us with his explanatory observations: "that's a brig: you see she has only two masts, and that's a sloop that's on before; but look behind you Miss Meredith, see what's coming now, there's a fine ship; there now, that's a West Indiaman—there now,

how should you like to be on board her, and take a trip across the Atlantic—suppose we hail her, and ask the Captain whether he'll take charge of 'e, heh?"

As there seemed no end to his running on in this way, I ventured to remind him, that as the band was playing, we might as well go to the promenade.

“ Well now stop a bit, I only want just to see how they'll manage in the turn of the river there. I wonder accidents don't often happen ;” and then he went on explaining things which every child knows, till I lost all patience. He wears one to a rav'ling. I longed to push him down the rocks, I was so provoked; for 'twas very windy on the hill; and as for my hair, inevitable ruin threatened every curl; I felt them fluttering about like the black film on the bar of a blazing fire.

Mrs. Jones appeared listening to him as if she thought he was displaying a wonderful depth of understanding, and hoping no doubt that I should report him as a man of parts; at length, however, she seconded my wishes, and we reached the promenade on the down; but as it was not a very fine evening, the genteel part of the company preferred the *pavé*, and pretty well crowded it was; there were many fashionable people, whose names I have picked up. There was the General and some of his family: another dashing set was just before us, and behind, was Mr. Ponsonby, with Mrs. Dormer and a large party. It was impossible to talk without being overheard, imagine my sensations then on hearing Mr. and Mrs. Jones's remarks; but all that was well-bred discourse to the nauseous farrago that I had presently to seem a party to.

Think over to yourself for one moment how I was encircled by fashion: put yourself in my place; and then imagine our meeting a vulgar looking woman (a stranger to me) with a fair, woolly face, glowing with a transparent sort of heat, her person furbelowed out in all sorts of finery, and accompanied by a daughter, whose appearance altogether was such as to give no very favorable notion of her character. On our encountering these objects, the mother stood still before us, and opening her eyes and mouth, and putting up two hands which looked like feet, began exclaiming, “ Goodness! gracious!! who could have thought of seeing *you* here! why how long have you been in *this* part of the world! my gracious! and so, Ma’am Jones is come to *Cliffon*, like all the rest of the gay folk! and how long have ’e been here,—and never come and paid me a visit!”

You can guess the intermediate replies of Mrs. Jones ; but she did not give this *gracious* lady a very cordial reception : the wretch however went on, “ well you must come and see us—you know where we live ; you ha’n’t forgot the old shop, I dare say. Well now, how odd ’twas that we should pop upon one another up at *Cliffon*, and I ha’n’t a been here afore I dont know when, such a long walk ; and ’tis so hot ; so there I went and sot down among them trees.”

It was evident Mrs. Jones wanted to escape, without knowing how it was to be accomplished ; so I volunteered my assistance ; and giving her arm a timely pull, to let a large party pass, we were by this means separated from Mrs. Carey, and we both cried out, “ Good evening, Ma’am, good evening,” and hurried away. This manœuvre seemed to di-

vert Mrs. Jones very much, and appropriating to herself a moiety of the achievement, she laughed heartily and said, " We managed that matter very nicely ; but I'm afraid, she'll think us very rude : but dear me I didn't want to go to her dinner, for I don't like her at all, I think she's a very low vulgar woman." "

I don't *think* so, thought I, but I marvelled much, what Mrs. Jones's rules of gentility might be, for in my poor opinion, this *fair* lady and Mrs. Hudson, Mrs. Jones's, friend are in that particular much of a muchness, except that the former has less scruples in clipping the King's English. You shall judge between them when I have given you a sample of Mrs. Hudson's happy manners, under very similar circumstances.

The evening these Hudsons drank

tea with us, the band as usual playing on the down, we sallied forth to hear it; there were a great many smart people walking, who must have been highly amused at Mrs. Hudson's observations, if they took the trouble to attend to them. She is a good-humoured, hearty, friendly woman, but understands no more of the world than a babe unborn, nor not so much, as the Irishman said.

We walked part of the way home with them, and on taking leave on Clifton Hill, Mrs. Hudson began renewing an invitation to dinner—and the way in which she talked of this dinner! a party of fashionables was near us, only conceive their hearing the following—the voices growing louder as we parted off.

“ Oh don't say a word about trouble,” said Mrs. Hudson, “ for 'ton't be none

at all: we shan't make any fuss with 'e ; so don't be uneasy on that score."

" We shall hope to see you," observed Mr. Hudson, " quite in a friendly way you know ; a joint of meat and a pudding ; perhaps a bit of fish."

" And plenty of pease and beans," added his wife, " for I know that's what you're so fond of."

This receiving general approbation we parted from them in *high good humour*.

Well to this dinner we went, and a tiresome day I had of it ; but it seems the Hudsons had altered their plan, for instead of receiving us in a free way, they invited a large party, and gave us a very handsome vulgar dinner: profusion was mistaken for elegance—no remove—no second course—not an inch of

table-cloth to be seen—the most incongruous articles appearing on the most intimate footing: at one corner bacon saluting blanc-mange; at another, jelly elbowing cabbage, in the immediate vicinity of fish; and in the middle a towering salver of whip-syllabubs with port wine at the bottom of them.

As for the company, 'twas the strangest set: some of them were serious sort of people; so after tea, there were no cards, and there they sat up, talking all manner of goodness; very edifying, no doubt, but which nevertheless, I don't mean to trouble you with.

The most lively topic that occurred, was a proposed party to Ashton to eat strawberries and cream; and a day was at length agreed on.

I begin to sigh for the tranquillity of

home: for gay places, unless you enter into their gaieties with proper spirit, are more tantalizing than pleasant to

Your ever affectionate,

E. M.

LETTER IV.

Clifton, Wednesday Morning.

I am very angry at not hearing from you ; but I conclude a certain gentleman engrosses more of a certain lady's thoughts, than her poor unfortunate exiled sister ; if however you have a lurking regard for this much-to-be-pitied damsel, the following will serve to let you know she has survived many a severe attack of horrification.

A sudden proposal by Mr. Jones of going to the ball, was to my surprise acceded to, by his better half. Of course

I did not fail to exhibit myself in my happiest *costume*, and my chaperon made a very handsome appearance in a pea-green silk, and looked comely and well enough; but not an inch of fashion about her.

We went time enough to see the rooms lighted; so there we sauntered up and down for half an hour, as if we had been cast upon a desert island; Mr. Jones and I performing liver and gizzard to a boiled fowl in a full suit of parsley and butter.

After admiring the rooms, Mrs. Jones began exclaiming against the *nonsense* of people coming so late; she declared 'twas quite "ridicklus."

At length the company began to flock in, and about half past nine, the dancing commenced. The rooms were

now tolerably crowded, but how different to the balls I had been used to, where I felt myself a person of some consequence ; here, I was nobody, and people pushed by me, as if I was a chair. Mrs. Jones wondered how they could be so rude ; she never saw such behaviour in the whole course of her life, she said.

At tea time an officer of one of the militia regiments, happened to be standing near our table, looking as if he did not know any one ; so Mrs. Jones out of pure civility, and ignorance of the world, offered him a dish of tea, for which I must say, he appeared very thankful ; and when the dancing recommenced, he, out of gratitude I suppose, asked me to dance. Truly, thought I, I am not very likely to get another partner ; and though I had a great repugnance to exhibit myself on such an in-

troduction, with a person whose name, even, I was not certain of, though I believed it to be either Watson or Watkins; yet as I was longing to dance, and as the man, to do him justice, was not much amiss in his appearance, I did not give him a direct refusal, and the music striking up a favourite tune, overcame all scruples; but how shall I describe his dancing! It really was a take-in; why the fellow had no more ear than a post: he sprawled about in the figure like a man in the dark; his spread hands waving in all directions; and as for his steps! his dancing master, (if he ever had one,) ought in common honesty to return the money: when one leg was off the ground, there was no calculating where it would alight, and he ducked and plunged about like clothes hanging to dry, in a high wind.

As for me, I felt that I looked and

danced well, and excited, I flatter myself, no little admiration ; as a proof of it the elegant Ponsonby procured an introduction to me, and after some conversation asked me to dance ; but unluckily, just as we were to have led off, the music ceased, which informed us all it was twelve o'clock. So provoking ! for he appears to be a *darling*, as Harriet Villars would say. By the by, it is a great while I think, since we heard from her.

Friday.

I have been to these strawberry gardens, and most heartily did I wish myself at Jericho, Jerusalem, or any other outlandish retreat. I told you Mr. and Mrs. Hudson and a Miss Brown were to be of the party, but truly, I did not

reckon on such *agreeable* supernumeraries as they thought proper to bring with them. I find my station in society becoming lower and lower every day. I thought Mrs. Jones bad enough; but now, her friend, and her friend's friend, want to be "*hail fellow, well met,*" with me, so that I find it necessary to be constantly upon my guard to prevent my being hedged in within the pale of vulgarity.

It was a most sultry afternoon; and, at about half past five, a hackney coach stopt at our door, containing "six precious souls, for pleasure all agog." Mr. and Mrs. Hudson, and Miss Brown, alighted, followed by Mrs. Carey, her daughter Jenny, and a Mr. Martin, whose loathsome attentions to *Miss*, proclaimed him to be her *accepted*. And who is Mrs. Carey; why no other than

the identical lady who was astounded at seeing "*Ma'am Jones at Clifton.*" We were afterwards joined by Mr. Carey, and two or three vulgar children.

As soon as we were ready we all set out, and walked to the ferry : the boat was on the other side, so we had to wait, with other parties on the same expedition—some of them appeared genteel and were near enough to us, to hear Mrs. Carey's striking remarks on the picturesque ; such as,

" Laws, how *purty* them trees grows on the hoppursut side ; *don't* 'em."

" Oh Ma'am," said Mrs. Hudson, " there's nothing like it anywhere: and only hark at the birds, how sweet they sing—hark ! I do think I heard the gookoo, hark ! " Gookoo ! gookoo !"

Oh here's the boat a coming; make haste master, make haste I say, all the strawberries will be gone else."

" Oh, dear, dear, dear, dear, how slow 'em be," cried Mrs. Carey, " and now they must go washing the slip; dear, dear, dear, we shall be all night getting there—oh, now I suppose we may proceed—dear me," continued she, pawing up her gown, " how slippery 'tis, lend me your arm Mr. Martin; take care, all on'e. Is that plank safe, Master? there's no danger of the boat, is there?"

" Here's some horses coming," observed Mr. Hudson, " better let them go first."

" Oh!" shrieked Mrs Carey, " I on't go if there's any hosses."

" Never you fear," said her husband

—"don't make a fool of yourself; they're as quiet as lambs."

"What good'll it do me," returned his wife; "what good'll it do me, I say, when we be hupset, and all drowned, to know that they was as quiet as lambs afore *this* evening: I on't go, I tell'e, not for all the strawberries in the kingdom."

"Well then you may stay by yourself, and go home by yourself, and live by yourself, if you can't behave like other people."

"Law, dont'e be so snappish—Well, then, now do stop a bit, cant'e. Let 'em all get in fust—Dear, dear, I do think that one looks as if he'd kick—he do, indeed—I can't go—he certainly will do something or other."

Further assurances of there being no danger, at length quieting her alarm, this *frightful* piece of goods was safely put on board.

We were soon landed on the other side, and a short walk brought us to the gardens—merely an orchard with bowers, &c. and swings for the amusement of children of all ages from three to thirty.

The gentlemen having given orders for a plentiful supply of strawberries and cream, down we all sat.

Mrs. Carey declared she could not *do* without her tea; so tea was had, and she began cramming with hot cakes, as if she was laying in for a week. Her daughter took a fancy to try the swing, and it was Mr. Martin's happy lot to put

the machine in motion. Oh, what a figure she cut ! What had she on ? The nymph had thought fit to apparel herself in a trumpery yellow muslin pelisse, shewing her red arms through the long sleeves ; a hat of the same, with a wreath of pink flowers in it, and cock'd on one side so as to display a gold comb—white beads round her neck !!! Her beau was dressed well enough, and might have passed for a gentleman, if manners had nothing to do with the business ; but he was execrably jocular, with an incessant loud vulgar laugh ; so irritating.

While we were paying our reckoning, a party of real fashionables arrived. A large mahogany table was placed in the centre of the garden for them, and they sat down to a merry repast : some officers were among them, and a military band began some delightful airs.

This induced our party to prolong their stay, and as we sauntered up and down the orchard, Mrs. Carey, as we came opposite the "smart folks," as she called them, would take great notice of them, and rather stop, as she passed them, in order to take a more thorough survey. One of the ladies was a Mrs. Dormer, (I had seen her at the ball :) her children were running about, and Mrs. Carey stopt one of the boys, and inquired his name; (so well-bred!) "Jack Robinson, Ma'am," he archly replied, and scampered off to enjoy the hoax with his party, for poor Mrs. Carey was completely taken in.

After these fashionables had finished their repast, they ordered the band to play Scotch reels; and throwing off all restraint, several of the party stood up and danced, which put Mrs. Carey in the fidgets to dance also: "as there

was music," she said, " why shouldn't we dance too ; 'twas no harm ;" and she actually seized Mr. Martin by both, hands and, turned him half round and back.

Then *we* all thought it would be pleasant to take a little stroll ; but we had not proceeded far, before Mrs. Carey expressed her fears that we should be too late for the boat, so we all returned ; Mrs. Carey quickening her pace till she got into three steps and a run ; and on coming in sight of the ferry, bawled out, " Oh, bless'e, we needn't a hurried so, there's the boat !"

The fashionable party reached the ferry in time to be our *compagnons du voyage*. Nothing but gaiety appeared to belong to them, while a sort of gloomy disappointment was visible in the faces of some of *our* friends. Mr. Jones, it seems,

was much surprized at the *charges*; and after having remained for some time silent, or nearly so, he asked Mrs. Jones how much she thought they had charged.

“ Lor, ’tis monstrous high to be sure,” exclaimed Mrs. Carey, “ bût there they must live you know; ’tis their harvest, and they must reap while the sun shines: Lor! Miss Meredith! how you’ve a splosht your nice *silk* stockings;” laying an emphasis on the quality of them, as being something remarkable; concluding with, “ dear, dear, dear! what a pity!”

Mr. Jones still continuing rather down-cast, Mrs. Hudson observed that she was *afeard* he wasn’t well; strawberries and cream, she thought, for her part, were very wholesome, but they didn’t agree with some people.

“ Don’t’e feel well, my dear,” said his wife; “ ah, well then, we must see what we can do for ’e ; you shall take a little tincter of rhubarb when we get home ; that’ll set all to rights.”

Then she would go on in a low tone, (but so as to be heard, I’m certain,) talking to me of a lady’s bonnet. “ There, I *do* say, those sort of bonnets are very pretty: Miss Meredith I say, you could make yourself one like it ; you see ’tis quite a plain front, with a puckered caul : ’tis very pretty ; I’m sure we can carry the pattern in our eye, can’t us ?”

Mr. Martin was inclined to be on his *fun*, which not happening to suit Mrs. Carey’s humour, she begged him to be quiet ; “ now dont’e,” said she, “ do’e stand still, and dont’e push one so, you make one so hot. Dear me !” she continued, “ it must be high water, I do

think : oh, look at that little boy : little master, I'm afeard you'll be over,---do'e take care my dear; 'tis very dandgerous to lean over so,---Master Robinson, my dear ! do you hear?"

The little quizzer was convulsed with laughter, and the hoax seemed to create some degree of mirth among his friends.

Mrs. Jones having whispered that 'twas Master Dormer, Mrs. Carey began shewing symptoms of great displeasure, and exclaimed, " he's a very naughty boy then, to go and tell me such a falsity ; augh ! I can't abide a liar : if a child of mine dared to tell me a lie, I'd flog him, as long as I could stand over him, I actively would."

" Oh, but this was only a joke you know," said Mrs. Jones.

“ Joke or no joke,” returned Mrs. Carey, “ I’d teach him to know better: it’s a parant’s duty so to do.”

“ Children do learn so many bad ways,” said Mrs. Hudson, “ ’tis unaccountable.”

“ Ah, *that* they do,” continued Mrs. Carey, “ there’s my youngest daughter, I don’t know what to do with her, not I; she has such a speret. I declare at times, her temper’s so, she’s like a ramping liant!”

“ ’Tis very trying,” observed Mrs. Hudson; “ but children will be children!”

Mr. Martin thought it witty to inquire, whether any of us were sea-sick; whereupon Miss Carey declared she was quite ashamed of him, he was “ so orrid vul-

gar.” He then began wondering how many were in the boat ; and lumping the Dormers and *me* with the Careys and Hudsons, and other trash that happened to be in the boat, he announced that there were forty-seven *of us*.

The rest of our party were not behind hand in giving specimens of their *good breeding*, so torturing to my feelings, that the passage seemed a voyage to the Indies. Miss Brown was the best behaved amongst them, but she is criminally ugly, and wore a gown that was made before the flood.

We spent a pleasant day yesterday, for it rained incessantly, and we kept within doors ; consequently I escaped the horror of being linked with vulgarity : I offered to make up a cap for Mrs. Jones, which she took in very good part,

observing 'twas an ill wind that blows
nobody any good.

Write soon to your affectionate

E. M.

LETTER V.

Swansea, July.

Your spirits, my dear Elizabeth, must have been at a low ebb when a rainy day could afford consolation ; but it must be torturing to be at such a place as Clifton with people that have no notion of life : and what plagues one so is, that they think they are giving you so much pleasure. How odd it was of those Careys to push themselves into your strawberry party, after the reception Mrs. Jones had given them. Now though I fully comprehend the mortifications you suffer, yet such is the perversity of human na-

ture, I cannot for my life help laughing.

My mother and I called a few days ago to pay court to Mrs. Stratton, who is settled in her new house ; for I think it is as well to keep in with her ; who knows but she might leave me a comfortable legacy ! Her pearl necklace would not be sneezed at : not that I ever expect to be a sous the better for her. Be that as it may, she received us very civilly. It is a delightful house, and I could not help envying her such nice large rooms, and thinking I could make a much better use of them than she does.

After shewing us the drawing-room, she must needs mount us up to the attics, expatiating all the time on the conveniences of her house. “ There,” said she, throwing open the door of a closet, “ there that’s a nice place for brushes or

any litters or lumber, and it serves to put out of the way a number of little presents given me by young ladies: I have had so many, I don't know where to put them, so they are all pushed in here." And sure enough there I beheld, swept up in a corner of this dark abode, sundry pasteboard baskets, hand screens, card cases, &c. in all their pride of gold borderings and gimcrack ornaments. Guess the indignation I felt on seeing in this hoard of legacy baits, with a flower-pot crushing in the lid, my own ingenious handicraft, the twelve-sided work-box that I gave her, by way of sending a sprat to catch a herring. All the distracting trouble of cutting each piece of card paper into the exact shape; the many I spoilt before I thought of using compasses; all the consultations we held; the endless work of painting so many different devices, all rushed into my mind, and woefully disturbed

the insinuating smile with which I always dress my countenance when I visit the old hag. I am afraid I saw the identical card racks you painted for her, peeping from underneath an unmeaning pasteboard vase, that Kate Jennings made. Now, thought I, could I warn Miss Davis of the fate of a paper lantern, on which she has been perseveringly employed for the last month. I vow I will never do another thing for her.—I shall never forget her asking me to work a continuation of that frightful border which was not enough to go round her ample gown, and in two days after, enquiring whether I had finished it. I remember it took me six weeks, and nearly ruined my sight into the bargain.

In our way home, we called at Highgrove, and were shewn into the sitting-room, where we found Mr. Dashwood. I think Mary Vaughan is setting her cap,

at him. Sarah and Penelope were at their lessons, and Penelope brought up her slate to her sister to shew the sum she was doing; which, together with Mrs. Vaughan's telling Sarah to finish her French exercise, as her sister would be ready to attend to her in an hour's time, gave us all to understand that Miss Vaughan was so mighty good and clever, as to instruct her little sisters. There is a great deal of shew-off in all that.

Do you recollect Margaret Draycott at school? to be sure you do: well, she is come with her mother and sisters to Griffith's cottage: they have taken it for some months. We have called on them, and had them to tea; yesterday we drank tea with them, and being only asked in the morning, made very little alteration in our dress, but found Margaret Draycott arrayed, fit for a ball. They had been disappointed of some friends they

had expected, so we had to make the best of sitting in circle; Mrs. Draycott fearing, she said, we should pass a very stupid evening, without either company or cards: so we had to be not at all fond of cards, and not at all prepared to meet a party. After the tea and coffee ceremony had been duly performed, and we had ransacked the neighbourhood in every direction for topics of conversation, the expense attending the education of girls was discussed, while five Miss Draycotts sat up weighing the obligation of the respective eight and thirty pounds per annum paid to Mesdames Briggs and Ackertorne: which indeed, Mrs. Draycott said, was not *all*;—"no," said Jane, "there's the accomplishments besides;"—"Ah," sighed Mrs. Draycott, "accomplishments indeed! it's all mighty well to talk of."—By this time you may suppose we began to be upon the yawning establishment; so seeing a piano in

the room, I thought proper to ask Margaret if she played;—no, she said, she didn't; nor her sisters?-----“ Ah,” sighed Mrs. Draycott again, “ there's my daughter Jane has learnt *seven* years, and now does not keep it up at all! and the quantities of music that I have paid for!” No wonder the poor woman loathes accomplishments. They asked me to play, which I was thankful to do, to keep myself awake, but was utterly confounded by the twanging tone of an old Ganer, totally unacquainted with the discipline of the tuning hammer. I was nevertheless held up by Mrs. Draycott as a pattern for her daughter's imitation. “ See,” said she, “ how well Miss Meredith plays! 'tis quite delightful to hear her. Ah, Mrs. Meredith, *your* money was not spent in vain; *your* daughter has profited by her instruction.” Margaret Draycott being so urged, at last sat down to the instrument, and

committed a cruel, barbarous; and inhuman murder on all my favorite dances.

After we had paid our respects to the wine, and some cake which had been baked Wednesday three weeks, we took ourselves home.

Mamma had such a quarrel with Martha yesterday, I thought it would have ended in her going—'twas a most flagrant offence, to be sure. Thomas was out, and she went to answer the door with a dirty apron, and her hands all over flour, with making pastry, of course it must happen to be the Stapyltons;—think of Mrs. Charles Stapylton having to give her card into such besmeared paws! When Mamma saw who had performed porter, to be sure she did give it her finely:—Susan too had a good thick slice for not coming down stairs time enough to have

prevented Martha's exposing herself and us.

Major Dawson left his P. P. C. cards the other day when (so lucky!) we happened to have an early dinner;—and Thomas being so obliging as to leave open the parlour door, he must have had the amusement of hearing the diabolical clatter of the knives and forks of those who had not the wit to keep them still; to say nothing of being poisoned with the violent smell of roast mutton.

By the way, I hear Mrs. Daly and Harriet are at Cheltenham: it must be very pleasant to jaunt about so independently; and stay at a place if they find it agreeable, or go on somewhere else, just as the fancy takes them. I am so fond of moving about, that I have a great notion the life of an officer's lady would suit me very well. Fairford still evinces

the greatest attachment, but I see him very seldom. I was walking with him one day, when of all the people in the world, I must meet Mrs. Dowling and Rebecca; they eyed me so unpleasantly. Rebecca simpering as if she thought it mighty funny; and Mrs. Dowling looking as if she doubted whether it would not be her "dooty" to tell my father.

Yours affectionately,

F. M.

LETTER VI.

Clifton, July.

I am afraid naughty Fanny did not profit much by our writing master's copy, "make no jest of another's distress," since my disasters make you so merry; while your account of Martha's misdemeanour, and the mal-apropos call of Mr. Dashwood, made me stamp my foot with vexation; though to say the truth, I own there is some laughability in those untowardnesses.

My compliments to Mrs. Stratton,

and she deserves to be tarred and feathered: had I seen my card racks in that dungeon of her's, for no fault of their's, sweet innocents, I should have clawed them out, and spirited them away.

Margaret Draycott had much more cause than you, to feel uncomfortable about her dress. Think what you would have felt, had *you* been the *bedizened*; like poor me, when I went to the Vaughans, after a week's invitation, (expecting to meet a party,) accoutred in pink sarcenet, trimmed with beads, flowers in my head, and bob ear-rings; and found them at work in their usual afternoon dresses; and nobody there but Mrs. Markham in a bonnet!

I am now enduring a succession of distresses such as were never before

heard of in a christian country. Our Bath jaunt! I wonder I am not in a fever. I really felt so jaded and worried on my return, that I had a great mind to be ill and go home: but you shall be favoured with the wretched particulars.

The day being fixed, imagine my anguish on finding it was decided that we were to go in a stage coach! a thick hazy morning promised fine weather, and a broiling hot day we had of it; at Bath too, of all places in the known world, at this time of the year!

Shall I soil my paper with a description of our fellow-sufferers in the coach? When we were, as I thought crowded together like a slave-ship, and almost suffocated with heat and dust, guess my sensations, on a huge grazier screwing

himself into a corner next me, because forsooth this abominable vehicle was licensed to carry six inside.

Mrs. Jones hoped he had room—oh, he said, it must do, and it should do. This opened a loathsome parley between them, made up of such common-place remarks, as I should detest myself for repeating.

Opposite to me, was a being of a still more villanous species ; an under-bred fop, who, I verily believe attempted to ogle ; but I took care to be in the sulks, and never spoke a word. Mrs. Jones, good creature ! was afraid I wasn't well ; that travelling didn't agree with me.

“ Better let down the other window,” said my fat neighbour, and give a little more air.”

“ Could the young lady eat a biscuit or some gingerbread,” kindly inquired a snuffy old woman, untying a pocket-handkerchief which appeared to contain a variety of rubbish of that sort.

“ No thank you, Ma'm, I was constrained to say, and I fear rather impatiently, as she replied, “ I hope no offence, Miss.”

“ 'Tis all strange to her,” said Mrs. Jones, in an apologetic tone, “ she hasn't been used to this kind of travelling, nor we shou'dn't have come in it, only 'tis so very convenient, the coach passes our very door.”

“ Yes, 'tis very convenient ;” said old snuffy, “ and I fancy, greater folks than any of us, find it so too, sometimes.”

There was something a little ambiguous in the drift of this remark, which occasioned a silence in our party, till Kelston house appeared in sight, which gave a more general turn to the conversation, and a distant view of Bath restored us all to good humour.

At length this tedious journey was over, and we alighted at the inn. I almost expired with insignificance as I descended the perpendicular steps. We were hardly asked by the waiter to walk into a common room, while every eye and hand was employed in welcoming the arrival of a carriage and four, &c.

After we had moped for a few minutes in the dull apartment allotted to stage-coach travellers, the door was opened by a waiter who inquired whether we stayed to dinner, meaning no doubt to better our accommodations if he re-

ceived a reply in the affirmative : a meek answer was given, that, “ No,—we believed we should dine at a friend’s.” The door slammed together.

After we had a little adjusted our dress, we set out on our rambles, trudging all over the city in every direction, from Sidney Gardens, to the tip-top of Landsdown Crescent, till Mrs. Jones’s face gradually assumed the hue and character of a red cabbage.

In Milsom Street Mrs. Jones was standing stock-still making loud wonderments at Fasana’s to the amusement of some genteel people in the shop, who coming out, as ill luck would have it, I recognized to be the Jerninghams. The tide of Mrs. Jones’s exclamations was checked, and as they stopped to speak to me, she stared at them as if she was looking for the first time at the

king and queen and all the royal Family.

The Jerninghams were very civil; hoped to see me, if I made any stay, &c. I was of course much obliged, and all that, and was endeavouring to evade an explanation of our plans, when Mrs. Jones must put in “we’re only just come over for the day, Ma’am, to shew Miss Meredith all the lions of the famous city of Bath, Ma’am, and to be sure,” continued she in a more familiar tone, “pretty well tired we are. We’ve been upon our legs ever since we got out of the coach at ten o’clock this morning at the—(jerking her thumb over her shoulder), at the—what d’ye call it, there, which seems to be a very comfortable place; only very high, I fancy.”

After this rencontre, we ventured into a confectioner’s for some refreshment:

it was a fashionable style of shop, and *we* seemed to enter, as if we were afraid of being turned out. Then out of so many dainties that were temptingly displayed before us, it was difficult to determine what to chuse, particularly as the price was first to be ascertained; like a poor child with a single half-penny.

Mrs. Jones whispered that we had better have some soup, but Mr. Jones having, I could see, a dread of the charge, hesitated before he gave his assent; which made his wife complain in a loud whisper, that it would be very hard indeed if we mightn't have a little soup, when 'twas to be our dinner. "I'm sure I'm almost famished, and tired to death, tramping all over Bath, as I have done this day."

Colonel Hartland, a friend of Pon-

sonby's, now came out of an inner room, and must have heard the whole of Mrs. Jones's complaint, as she stood close to the door.

Our soup was then ordered, and we retreated to satisfy our keen hunger, leaving Colonel Hartland lounging in the shop, where he was soon joined by two or three other gentlemen.

We made the most of our time, and having despatched our soup, we summoned resolution to partake of some of the delicacies of this mansion of *taste*. Our account was next to be settled: this was a fearful business; we were charged for an article or two more than Mr. Jones thought we had had; and the bill was not discharged (imagine my feelings!) till Mr. Jones had, over and over again, in the hearing of Colonel Hartland, expressed his doubts of its correctness.

the whole finishing with a sharp dispute.

We had taken our places by the latest coach, in order to have more time to see Bath; and carelessly let the time slip by, till we suddenly found the hour of departure was arrived. Mr. Jones hurried on with his wife under one arm, and myself under the other, at such a rate that the people stared as if we were all mad. In our flurry, we missed our way; now we began to grow distracted. The sign of the inn was at length hailed with a loud shout of acclamation, which, however, was soon turned to dismay on seeing the coach drive from the door. "Stop! stop!" vehemently called out Mr. Jones, without being heard by the driver, so off he ran as fast as his legs could carry him, leaving his wife and myself to manage as well as we could. Mrs.

Jones whisked into the bar of the inn for a little bundle ; then begging me to make haste, began running through the street. I could not bring myself to a run, but was walking most unfashionably fast, when I again encountered Charles Jer-ningham and his sister, who penetrating our dilemma, informed me, that the gentleman had stopped the coach. Mrs. Jones, not aware of this good news, looked back somewhat angrily at seeing the delay, exclaiming, “ you cannot stop now, Miss Meredith, you must come on for the life of ’e, or we shall be too late.”

Mr. Jones now came running back, his face as red as the sun in a fog, and crying out, “ what are you all about there, you can’t stop a minute; the coachman says he won’t wait---come along.” Oh, how humbled I felt.

Tired with so much walking about, and overcome with our exertions to overtake the coach, our ride home was not devoted to much conversation; the few sentences which Mrs. Jones addressed to me, I replied to rather pettishly, which, considering she's my god-mamma, and has something pretty to leave, was neither so dutiful, nor so prudent as might have been expected from a lady of my good sense. *She* seemed vexed too; we all appeared as if we were sorry for something, and arrived home in no very lively mood—so ended our day of pleasure.

E. M.

This morning the servant of the house was kind enough to inform me, that the *mullentary* was to be reviewed on the

downs to day. What's that to me, thought I; I have no equipage to take me there, and as for mobbing it with the sutlers, it's an amusement I don't covet..

LETTER VII.

Swansea, July.

MY DEAR ELIZABETH,

I am obliged to seek some remote corner of the house to enjoy your delightful journal, for fear my laughter should alarm the family. I quite despair of giving you any entertainment in return: you know so well, how we are going on, that to say a syllable on that homely topic, would be as absurd as aunt Patty's shrewd observations on the weather, as if she were the only person

in the world who could discover whether it was hot or cold.

As for parties, I never knew any thing half so forlorn in that way ; and among the visitants such a plentiful scarcity of smarts; it is really deplorable. The Richardsons are here, and I drank tea with them yesterday; they are in their old lodgings, and as hum-drum as ever. There is a tall spare figure of a Miss Parminster on a visit to them, with a face that might have been pretty ten years ago; but now, her *tout ensemble* presents an exact model of beauty on the wane; the lady nevertheless, affects to be *dans sa premiere jeunesse*, but unluckily for her, the Miss Richardsons had two or three young girls about their own age, none of them, I am sure, exceeding nineteen, among them my friend Charlotte Morris; so we young people were so full of our own jokes and topics,

that seemed a foreign tongue to poor Miss Parminter, that we at length drove her to seek a retreat by the side of bundling Mrs. Richardson, making her feel forty at least.

Mamma had a cold; so Maria stayed at home to keep her company: she says she *prefers* staying at home!—well, every one to their liking: however, she went with us to the last ball, and looked very neat and pretty, in a muslin dress that I suppose did not cost her half a crown: she danced with young Evans; so suitable! and so contented she was with the simple swain, though for my poor part, I would as soon have had a kitten for a partner.

The ball itself was flat, stale, and unprofitable. I had none of my right partners: Fairford has been absent some time on a visit to his uncle; none of the

Vaughans or Stapyltons were there; and as for Dashwood, I should as soon expect the moon to ask me to dance. I hear Mr. Torrens is going to be married to a sister of Lord Strawarne;—what nonsense it was, asking him to our party. But of all the matches that are talked of, who ever dreamt of any hero's falling in love with Miss Wheeler's flimsy features! why my dear, I'm told she is seen every where with a naval officer in full uniform dangling after her! and 'tis said they are to be married immediately. The family seem to chuckle mightily about it; but bless them all, I would not wish a kitchen-maid such luck; this gallant tar, I find, is nothing more or less than a grey-headed midshipman!

Thursday.

My letter has remained unfinished nearly a week for want of materials. We

dined yesterday at the Jolliffes;—a large party—every root and branch of the Nortons were there, and a right dull day we had of it, unless a curious Mr. and Mrs. Higginbottom could rescue it from such a stigma. The lady is bordering upon fifty, and of a comely appearance; rather formal in her manners, and as precise in dates as an almanack; she appeared possessed also, of a remarkable store of information about persons of quality; the first specimen of which, was drawn forth by Mr. Jolliffe's mentioning that Mr. Torrens was married that morning to the second daughter of the late Lord Strawarne.

“Excuse me, Sir,” said Mrs. Higginbottom, in a slow measured tone, as if she were reading, “’tis the *youngest* daughter. His lordship had no issue by his first lady, who dying in 1783, his lordship married secondly, Jemima,

daughter and co-heiress of Wm. Sotheby, Esq. of Spring Park; by whom he had issue, first, Charles Henry, the present Earl, born in 1790, married to his first cousin Miss Fraser, sister to Viscountess Hatherleigh; secondly, Gabriella; thirdly, Catherine Anne; fourthly, a son, still-born; and fifthly, Emma Louisa, which is the lady in question."

We were all much amused with this display of her accuracy, upon a point of so little consequence; and as she did not appear possessed of a superfluity of polish, I was not a little puzzled to account for the information, and numerous anecdotes she gave us about the nobility, till Mr. Jolliffe let me into the history of these Higginbottoms.

The husband is one of those lucky mortals; I think one hears of such, about once in three years; who are left large

fortunes by old gentlemen, of the same name, but *no relation!!!* The one in question was originally a porter's boy at the Golden Cross, Charing Cross; and rose by degrees to the dignity of head waiter: he afterwards became butler in a gentleman's family, where he got acquainted with the housekeeper to Lord Norbury, who had been brought up from a child in the Earl's family; her aunt having been for half a century the historian of the castle, to which important situation the niece in due time succeeded; and from the constant habit of describing the pictures and detailing the extensive connexions of the Norbury family, she became so conversant with the genealogy of the nobility, that she may be fairly intituled, "The peerage personified."

Soon after Mr. Higginbottom was married to this rarity, an old gentleman left

him a handsome fortune, for no other reason than because, by some lucky chance, he happened to have been christened Daniel Higginbottom! An important change now took place in Mr. Higginbottom's manners, dress, &c. he studied how to appear *the gentleman*: his linen was observed to be always clean, and his nails, hitherto most unnaturally slighted, became the objects of his care; and totally forgetful of his origin, he now affects to be a man of family, and in his vulgar mother tongue, talks of the antiquity of the Higginbottoms.

All this you may think very prosing, but had you heard the toast-and-water conversation that prevailed, overflowing all common bounds of insipidity, you would have called this *crème de noyau*.

Old Jennings and his dowdy daughter

were there, and gave us their annual invitation to spend a day at the farm, *while the currants and gooseberries were about*, and begged Miss Shirley and I would come over whenever we liked, and eat as many as we chose.

They take care how to time their invitation, but I'll see their currants and gooseberries in the tide, before I'll stir an inch to get one.

Did they ever ask us to come when the peaches and nectarines were in season, I should be glad to know? No, never: and then, when they are all over, Kate Jennings will tell me, what immense quantities they had; that she ate a dozen in a morning; that they quite dropt off the trees! her dainty stomach, I fancy, must learn to do without them this year, for I hear their trees were all blighted. I don't pretend to be sorry.

Mr. Jolliffe's eldest son is returned from Jamaica, and has acquired I understand a very good fortune: he appears much taken with Maria Shirley; but I'm afraid there is not a corresponding *liking* on her part: 'tis true, he is on the wrong side of forty, deplorably ugly, and has lost an eye; but then, he is said to be the best tempered man in the world, and certainly has a great regard for her; so that, if she would but take a fancy to the Adonis, and give him a tiny bit of encouragement, the match might soon be brought about.

I had no idea that Mrs. Jones could be such a nuisance: to be sure, at home she deals very sparingly in the agreeables; but if she had the Indies to leave, you couldn't suffer more: were I in your place, I should die no other death.

Only think of the fluster I was in the other day: in walking out with my fa-

ther, who should we meet but Fairford: he bowed as he passed, but of course did not offer to join us ; my father was looking as black as thunder.

Anne was with me, and the little plague eagerly cried out that's Captain Fairford, wasn't it? Susan says, he's over head and ears in love with my sister Fanny.

“ I'm sorry,” said my father, “ that Susan has not more discretion than to talk such nonsense to you ; and am very sorry, indeed, that a daughter of mine should be the subject of a servant's impertinent remarks.”

I felt my cheeks burn like a furnace, and said something to turn the discourse as soon as I could.

F. M.

LETTER VIII.

Clifton, July, Saturday.

I still am doomed to be the living record of the miseries of human life. Yesterday morning we went to see Brockley Combe, a beautiful romantic glen, about eight miles from Bristol. It is usual to make parties to visit this enchanting spot, but I fancy it was thought it might be accomplished in a more economical way by ourselves. We took some cold provisions, dined under an oak, and returned home to tea, after

which we strolled about the down, and, in returning home about nine, we were overtaken by Ponsonby, who joined us, and as he had been lately at Brockley, we were full of the beauties of the place, and our conversation was kept up with considerable spirit.

Mrs. Jones behaved remarkably well, for *her*, and did not blunder on any violent vulgarity, but because I had ventured to hint, on our journey home from Bath, how much more preferable a chaise would have been, she took care to let Ponsonby understand that we went in a *post-chaise* to Brockley, as if it was elevating us to the height of fashion, when I'm rather inclined to think a hack chaise is considered by the *somebodies* a very low thing.

However, he might not have noticed that, and I flattered myself that this day

would pass off without inflicting fresh torments; when, unluckily, as we came to our door, Mrs. Jones asked him to walk in, with “pray do, stop and take a bit of bread and cheese with us.”

The door was already opened; Ponsonby and I were in the middle of a subject; he did not decline Mrs. Jones’s invitation; I felt it necessary to second it, and he actually walked in! I verily believe without knowing what he did, for he is a little eccentric, and inclined now and then to be rather absent; for he could not have been aware that he was invited to supper, at an hour when every rational creature was at tea.

After we had all four entered our little darksome drawing-room, Mrs. Jones left us for a few minutes; and hearing a great deal of whispering on the stairs,

between her and the servant of the house, I exerted all my eloquence to drown this vulgar confab.

At length Mrs. Jones re-entered, and addressing herself to Mr. Jones, informed us all, that it was very extraordinary that Nanny should have gone out without asking leave. "Don't you know where she is gone?" continued she, speaking to the servant, who was still heard on the landing-place.

"I doant knaow, Ma'am," answered a very low-life voice; "she said, as how she was just agwain to step out a bit, and should be back in a minut."

"'Tis very impertinent of her, I do say," said Mrs. Jones, "and 't isn't the first time neither: when we are at home, to be sure 'tis a different thing, because there's the other maid, but to take

such liberties here, is what I won't put up with."

"I dare say she'll be back presently," observed Mr. Jones; and then talked of the weather, to turn the subject, while his wife left the room to give some further directions, and again entered with all the appearance of concealed anger.

The house-drudge now made her entrée. A fat blowsy young woman in short petticoats, displaying black stockings, a pink gingham gown, with the waist behind exalted to her shoulder blades, and sunk in front under an overwhelming rotundity. Her hands and arms of a flame colour, and none of the cleanest!

The bare recollection of this evening brings on a nervous palpitation: the girl flounced about in a frumpish hu-

mour at doing our servant's work: she was a week laying the cloth, which she smoothed down with her execrable paws, and placed the black-handled knives and forks on the table in any-how fashion.

Then to see all our little matters of a supper concern! mustard, vinegar, &c. in villainous cruets. During this ceremony, Miss Elizabeth Meredith was shrinking smaller and smaller into nothingness: she endeavoured, indeed, to draw Ponsonby's attention from what was going forwards, but the more she hammered for conversation, the less she had to say, and for the life of her she could not help watching the gawkey bringing in the supper.

I thought I must have swooned when the unsightly remains of a roast leg of mutton were deposited on the table; a

few radishes and butter made another dish, corresponding to a plate of stale biscuits, while a lump of cheese made a conspicuous figure at bottom.

Nothing else appearing likely to grace the board, Mrs. Jones rose, and motioned Mr. Ponsonby to the table, with, "Well, Sir, will you please to draw *nigh*: we are rather badly off to night, what with Nanny's playing us this trick, and being in a lodging-house, we have nothing about us that we are used to." Did she think Mr. Ponsonby a fool! Has Mrs. Dormer no better accommodations then, because she's in a lodging-house, forsooth!

Ponsonby declared that he never took any supper.

"Dear," cried Mrs. Jones, "well, now, that's so different to us; for we

always make a hearty supper, so I'll thank'e Mr. Jones for a slice of mutton: 'tis very much cut into, I must say; I fancy our Nanny must have had visitors."

" 'Tis quite shameful!" muttered Mr. Jones, as he turned about the joint from side to side, till he turned my stomach.

" 'Twas a very nice leg," continued Mrs. Jones, " I chose it out of half a dozen: do let me persuade you to take a bit---we'll have up a bit of pickle. Here, what's your name, here's the key of the little cupboard on the kitchen stairs, and you'll find a small jar of pickle-cabbage; bring some up, and make all the haste you can. You need n't wait to put it out in a saucer, but bring the jar as it is ---make haste. I don't much like trusting her with the key, as 'tis the only

place I got to lock up anything.—I've got my sugar and candles, and things there. Now you *must* let me help you to this nice little bit, Mr. Ponsonby."

Ponsonby persisted in saying he never ate supper by any accident.

" Well, *you* will, Miss Meredith."

I, of course, declined.

" Why, what's the matter with *you* then, my dear; you that make such hearty suppers. I wish you had seen her last night, Mr. Ponsonby, with the pork chops! 'twould have done your heart good to have seen her. If I'd thought of it, we *could* have had a little of the mutton hashed!"

What, thought I, did she think it possible for the cookery of that kitchen wench to tempt him !

Mr. Jones having called for beer, the girl had to go down for it, and then came up with the melancholy intelligence that the cask was out.

On hearing this, Mr. Jones flew into a violent passion; he was now certain that Nanny must have had people in the house, and was resolved that the jade should not stay with them another week.

“What shall we do,” said Mrs. Jones, “shall we send up to the hotel for some porter?”

“No—no. We can do without, if Mr. Ponsonby won’t take any thing.”

“Well, then,” said Mrs. Jones, “we’ll have some rum and water presently—you won’t alter your mind, will you, Sir, and try a bit of something?”

I longed to say, do let him alone Ma'am ; I wonder you can ask him to eat, when there is not a thing on the table fit for a Hottentot ; but Mrs. Jones went on pressing him, and again apologized for the supper's not being so comfortable as she could wish ; he assured her, nothing could be better.

“ It don't seem so, then. Lizzy, my dear, (she will call me Lizzy), do look in the cupboard : I put away a few strawberries, perhaps we can tempt Mr. Ponsonby.”

He begged me not to trouble myself ; but the strawberries were produced. And what were they ?---the perishing refuse of our dessert : never the best ; and now ! their stems betraying their want of freshness ; and the fruit ! of all hues but the right one : lilac predominating !

“ Dear ! dear ! how soon they do turn ! ” cried Mrs. Jones. “ I declare if we don’t make a finish of them to-night, they’ll be good for nothing by to-morrow. Will you try a few Mr. Ponsonby, I believe you’ll find them better than they look : bring the sugar my dear.”

Ponsonby politely declined being poisoned ; and in order, I suppose, to put an end to their entreaties, said he would take a biscuit to keep them company : he had just before asked for some water, and the wretch now brought it to him in a white ware cup !

“ Bless my heart ! ” cried Mrs. Jones, staring at the girl, “ why where have you lived, child ; do bring a clean glass and a decanter of water. She has no notion of things.”

Nanny was now heard coming in, and

was soon summoned to the drawing-room.

“ Why what in the name of goodness Nanny could make you think of staying out till this time ! I declare if you offer to go out another time without asking leave, you shan’t stay another day with me, if it’s ever so.”

Nanny appeared much confused; and said she had only just stepped out a bit to see an acquaintance, and did not expect to have been so long.

“ Don’t tell *me*,” cried Mrs. Jones, “ you’re for ever just stepping out, I never knew anything like it, things are come to such a pass—we can’t ask a friend to come and eat a bit of supper with us, but you must go out that very evening.”

Every order was now given with angry impatience: "bring up some more radishes;---don't take away the butter: here, you can carry this down---make haste."

"She has got a sweet-heart I suppose," said Mr. Jones, "it turns all the girls heads," continued he with a leer, which seemed to include me in his remark; to say nothing of making Ponsonby a party concerned.

"Now Nanny," said Mrs. Jones, "bring us some hot water, and see if there's a lemon, we'll have a little punch."

If the *thought* of the punch had tended to soften Mrs. Jones's wrath, a few glasses of the favorite beverage, put Mr. and Mrs. Jones into high good humour. Mr. Jones became very talkative, and enter-

tained us with some humorous stories, in which he has, it must be owned, rather a happy knack.

When Ponsonby had taken leave, Mrs. Jones observed, he did not seem to be at all a sociable sort of person ; and how different it would have been if Mr. Watkins had dropt in to supper.

“ I dare say,” continued Mrs. Jones, “ he would have been as pleasant and as free as if he was at home, and not have sat up, as if there was nothing good enough for him.”

I endeavoured to excuse Ponsonby, by saying, that no doubt he had dined late, and of course, could not be very hungry at half past nine, and that he was certainly a more agreeable man than Mr. Watkins.

“ Ah, well, there, if you like him, my dear, it’s all very well.”

Monday.

After such a disgusting evening (and I should not like Ponsonby if I thought he was not disgusted with the scene), you may suppose I felt desirous of meeting him under more favourable circumstances, that I might have an opportunity of removing the nausea which that supper might have excited.

In walking through the mall yesterday morning with Mrs. Jones, I saw him approaching, and was in hopes he would have joined us : there appeared to be no haste in his movements, and nothing to prevent his taking a turn with us, but no doubt the supper scene came

across his mind, and he passed us with a bow : he met some ladies immediately afterwards, and joined them, though he could not walk with me: no, nor ever will again, I suppose.

Wednesday.

I despair of giving you an adequate idea of all the vexations I meet with. My feelings are so peculiarly acute, that even where I am a perfect stranger, I cannot endure to be supposed vulgar. Imagine then, our going to a play, and having the good luck to find the Hudsons and Careys in the same box. Oh, how I was tortured with their ridiculous and silly remarks on an elegant party before us, which they could not fail of hearing, being always made in a loud whisper ; such as,

“ I heard him call her your *ladyship*.”

“ Which of 'em ?” eagerly cried Mrs. Hudson.

“ There, she, in that comical turban.”

“ She's a Roman Catholic,” said Mrs. Hudson, gazing on Mrs. Ludwycke with as much awe as if she had seen a sorceress ! “ I heard a gentleman behind me say so.”

“ Lor ! they're talking French I *do* think, or some outlandish gibberish or other.”

Kemble was playing Richard the Third ; but instead of extolling his masterly delineation of the part, Mrs. Carey, after enquiring who wrote the play, began exclaiming against the guilt

of the bloody Richard. “ Oh the wicked wretch !” she repeated at intervals ; “ what a villain he must be : what’s he going to do now ? the wretch ! I never heard any thing so horrid !”

“ Law !” cried Mrs. Hudson, “ I heard somebody say it rained : I hope to goodness it don’t ; for I’ve got nothing but this shawl to put over me. Mrs. Jones, here’s bad news for *us* ! Miss Meredith !” calling me so loud as evidently to attract notice ; “ Miss Meredith, I say, ! do you know it rains ?”

“ And there she has nothing but thin shoes on,” said Mrs. Jones. “ I *do* think we must have a coach : it’s a pity, too. You could step out, Mr. Jones, and see how the weather is, and learn whether any coach is to be had, and what would be the charge——so vexing to have it rain !”

Mr. Jones returned from his reconnoitre with the intelligence that it rained “dogs and cats!” and began upbraiding his wife for not having brought proper cloaks and shoes in the probable chance of such a misfortune happening; while she retorted upon him, that she had suggested bringing an umbrella, but that he would not for fear of losing it.

The entertainment was now over; but the party before us still remained, when one of the ladies asking a gentleman to inquire for their carriage, Mrs. Carey took upon herself the office of informing them that there was no coach to be had; adding, “’tis a terrible wet night, there’s no such thing as walking. We’re all in a sad purdicament! And if we get a coach, we shall have to pay a pretty penny for it *I* warrant; they charges abomernably when they knows one’s at a nonplus.” The ladies stared at her as

if they thought her mad, while she continued her oration with the utmost complacency. “ Why now, there was t’other day I went to call on a friend in the Old Market, and there it got late, and I was so hot and tired, I’d have given the world for a bit of a lift ; well, coming back, I met a hack just by Peter’s pump, and if you’ll believe me, he charged half a crown for taking me home : now I knew ’twasn’t more than a two shilling fare, and as for waiting, says I, ’twasn’t but a minute, at the butcher’s, while I bought a pound of sassages ; besides, says I, you know very well you can’t charge for time and distance too ; so, says I, if you say a word more, I’ll have’e up before the mayor !—Oh, they *will* impose, if they can !”

Imagine what I felt at being leagued with such wretches. We fortunately

procured a coach, and got home in dry clothes.

I felt little inclined to partake of any more amusements with such annoying Joneses as these are; but hoping to meet Ponsonby whom I had not seen since the morning he met us in the Mall, I started the idea of going to the ball last night, and as Mrs. Jones has now in a great measure overcome her dread of large parties, she readily agreed to my proposal.

We went at a more rational hour than we did on the former occasion; I felt anxious to be again on an agreeable footing with Ponsonby, and began looking out for him, but what must be the first object to greet my eyes on entering the room, but my lout of a partner at the last ball. Mrs. Jones has no notion of evading speaking to a person, nor, in-

deed, had she, poor soul, an idea that I should wish it; and having learnt that his father is a *topping* tradesman at Exeter, she gave me a wink, as much as to say, you had better set your cap at him, and then simpered and nodded till she had lured him to my side, and my fate was decided.

You may imagine my eyes often wandered in search of Ponsonby; and just before tea he came in with the Dormers and a fashionable party who had arrived in the morning from Bath. He was so engaged with these ladies that when we met, after tea was over, he only bowed *en passant*. Of course I gave up all hopes of dancing with him, and wished to sit out, but could not escape an introduction to a brother-officer of my partner's; so we stood up---a pretty contrast; for he was grinning from ear to ear like a scaramouch, while my visage, in spite of

all my efforts to conceal mortification, lengthened to an ell. I could not resist being rather stately to him, and as his little figure hopped and skipped about, he must have looked as if he was dancing round a May-pole. His dancing was abominable ; his elbows and knees forming right angles, as if he were describing the alphabet by attitudes. If dancing be the poetry of motion, *his* was downright doggerell.

Ponsonby, as I expected, stood up with one of his party, who took care to go to the top, though she had not danced before ; the wretch : but of all the balls I ever was at, I never saw such pushing for places ; several ladies came and stood above me with all the coolness imaginable : my spirits were not equal to squabbling ; but my partner's remarks made me sick : he had a *great* mind, he said, to speak to 'em, *that* he had ; for

'twasn't fair: as to those, that took the top of the dance, they were grandees he supposed, and *we* had nothing to say to *them*; but as for the others, he would see me righted, *that* he would. I was obliged to beg him to be content, for I began to fear we should be like the lion and the unicorn *a fighting* for the crown: but I could not resist asking a saucy girl who put herself above me, whether she had been down the dance; "No, Ma'am," said she; "no more have I;" was my answer; which so far shamed her, as to make her retreat to a few couples below: but I saw her presently within three of the top!

Ponsonby's party did not stay late, and after he had seen them to the carriage, (which I heard announced for Lady Anne Dormer ;) he returned to the room, and came up to us just as we were going, whereupon my scaramouch obsequiously

took his leave ; thanked me for having danced with him, and supposed he could not be of any *further* use.

After Mrs. Jones and I had accoutred ourselves in our cloaks, &c. Ponsonby handed me to—not to a carriage—not to a chair ; but to—the door ! where not even a servant and lanthorn waited for us : so I had with burning cheeks to laugh off our *footing* it home, as it was so very near, and so fine a night. Ponsonby accompanied us to our lodgings, and as we knocked at the door, all that horrid supper scene rushed into my mind, and no doubt into his ; and if it did not, Mrs. Jones took care it should, by inviting him to walk in ; adding, she believed she could promise him something a little more comfortable than the last time. I thanked heaven he declined : but Mrs. Jones observed when he was gone, “ ’tis very perverse of the man ; but there, ’tis just like him. I

can't think for my part what you can see in him."

"He is certainly quite the man of fashion," said I.

"Ah, well, give *me* a nice, pleasant, good tempered young man; worth a hundred of your fine gentlemen."

I wished her good night, without giving her the most distant hope of coming into her way of thinking.

What have I been at all this time! why, I have heard of a piece of news that I can scarcely credit, and here have I been bottling it up like green gooseberries for Christmas: Harriet Villars is married! it was reported to me at the ball as a fact. What a sly thing! but it was a very sudden affair I find. Introduction, courtship, proposal, and wed-

ding all brought about since her arrival at Cheltenham. You are a little curious, perhaps, by this time, to know whom she has deemed sufficiently "*amiable*" to deserve her hand: it is the elder brother of the Mr. Worthington, who was at Swansea a short time ago. I was in hopes of seeing her here before I left Clifton, but the Joneses talk of returning home: so stupid, just when one is beginning to make some acquaintance.

E. M.

I hope you have recollected to give my swansdown tippet an airing, to secure it against the villainous moths.

LETTER IX.

Swansea, August.

YOUR bottled gooseberries, my dear, did not arrive quite so fresh as you might wish. I had just heard the news from Mary Vaughan. I can't account for Harriet's not writing to one of us.

I hear the grandfather's pride stood out for some time, but on its being satisfactorily made out that Miss Villars's family is a branch of the Fitzalberts, and her mother great niece to an earl, his consent was obtained: so she is now Mrs.

Arthur Bolingbroke; it sounds very well I think. I hear the wedding clothes are delicious; how happy she must be; with so much taste, and so well entitled to indulge it. I'm told he's a very elegant young man: quite one of Harriet's *amiable* interesting beings.

I feel quite naughty for being so bad a correspondent: my mind, 'tis true, has been not a little perplexed; but you are on no account to take it into your head that your letters are unseasonable, they really do me a great deal of good, and I read them over and over again, to divert my thoughts from a subject on which I cannot decide, with complete satisfaction to myself.

Fairford and I have seriously talked the matter over. I am sorry to find he has very little besides his pay; but he

has good expectations from an uncle, and if my father would afford us some help, we are persuaded that, with economy, we could manage very well; and I'm sure I would willingly make every sacrifice in my power: but I feel certain my father would not give his consent; it must however be asked, and if, as we have reason to expect, he gives us no hopes of his ever approving the match, Fairford thinks I should be perfectly justified in marrying him without.

This affair makes me quite ill: I can't eat, through flurry of spirits.

Maria has received very distressing accounts from home: her father's health is far from mending, and he has lately had something of a paralytic attack. His circumstances, I apprehend, are much straightened: one of the sons is

gone to Carmarthen to be an assistant to his brother, who is a hatter, I believe, and is doing pretty well.

It has been suggested to Maria, I find, that if she could hear of a situation as governess, it would be very desirable. Her accomplishments certainly well qualify her, but I should fear her gentle disposition would not command sufficient authority. We have pressed her to continue with us as long as is agreeable, but she does not think it right to stay so long from home, and is now only waiting for some conveyance.

How abominable that leg of mutton business was !

We have gone out very little : only to one dull evening party (at the Morgans), and the ball, which was very near akin

to the last, with this difference in my favour, Fairford was there. Before he came, that lout of a Bob Morgan drew nearer and nearer, gaining courage by inches to ask me to dance; but before he could open his lips, I cut off his hopes with, "Thank'e Robert, I'm engaged." The oaf grinned in my face, "I was n't going to ask you, so you need n't have been in such a hurry." I longed to box his ears.

Miss Davis, it seems, has quarrelled with her crony Lucy Cottle, and is trying hard to scrape an intimacy with me: but the minx is mistaken, if she thinks I'm to be caught by a pennyworth of flattery. She makes a point of holding out her hand to me whenever we meet, and coaxingly calls me "Fanny." But I've studied the thermometer of civility, and take care to "*Miss Davis*," her al-

most to freezing point: nevertheless she'll hook herself on to my arm at the ball, and hopes to come in for a slice of my cast-off partners: but I'll have her to know, that's not the cloak-pin for her trumpery to dangle on.

We dine to-morrow at the Vaughan's: a long postponed wedding-dinner to the Stapyltons.

F. M.

Mr. Perkins has sent in a little note for you £2. 8s. shall I pay it? the man has called twice.

Saturday.

Every thing elegant as usual at the

Vaughans. What d'ye think appeared with the dessert?—Dick Pratten!! would one think it possible; but he had a message to my father, and the servant, I suppose, persuaded the fool to walk in: my father rose in confusion, and would have hurried him out of the room, but Dick thought proper to say, “ Oh, I didn't disturb'e, Sir; I on'y just called to know if those goods were to go, because,” beginning to mumble, “ the capt'n says, if they aren't put aboard to-night, they can't go at all.”

My father despatched him as soon as possible, and I was consoling myself that he must have passed for a clerk, when the ourang-outang re-appeared with a grin, “ Oh, I forgot, here's a letter for cousin Fanny, that I took up at the post.” Never was a letter from you so unwelcome before. I did not venture to look at the Stapyltons:—I know Mr.

Dashwood drank off his wine to conceal a smile. You may imagine what I felt : my mother thinks she shall never unblush.

LETTER X.

Clifton, August.

OH, what a list of pride-wounding miseries have I endured: to few, would I confess so much; but to my dear Fanny, who, I know, can so well judge of my feelings, I will make a full disclosure. You may readily imagine, that to such a man as Ponsonby I must naturally wish not to have our family let down; now conceive my horrible sufferings. Ponsonby and Mrs. Hudson, with a friend of her's, an old Mrs. Brett, unfortunately clashed in a morning visit, which hard rain protracted to a most dis-

tressing length. This Mrs. Brett formerly lived at Swansea. I was therefore called upon to remember her; she was sure I must, she said; for she recollected my being in company with her at my aunt Pratten's. I affected total forgetfulness: she had the advantage of me, I said; but her snuffy phiz was not to be so soon forgotten—I remembered her full well, and how we all laughed at her losing at cards. “Well,” she said, “’twas very strange:” then she thought it requisite to make particular enquiries after our good father and mother: only imagine my sensations on her and Mrs. Jones’s entering largely into our family concerns; and the odious dialogue was kept up with great spirit on both sides to the following tune, while I sat listening with tortured feelings, like a quail writhing on the fire.

“Why, Miss Meredith, you must be the oldest of ’em all, I should think.”

“ Oh, no Ma’am,” said Mrs. Jones ;
“ there’s Mr. William and Miss Fanny.”

“ Well, then, my memory—Why, I recollect Miss, when your father and mother were married ; and a nice couple they made, every body said ; and how prudent they set out ; and how we all admired them for it. Ah, and now, you see, Mr. Meredith lives like a gentleman ; and has brought up all his family so well. Let me see---ah, your eldest brother married Miss Price, the apothecary’s daughter.”

“ And as ordinary a little body,” cried Mrs. Jones, “ as ever you set eyes on ; ’twas plain he didn’t marry for love there ; he had his p’s and q’s about him : he looked to the main chance, as his father used to say ; ah, and he sticks to the business too. Then there’s Ned, he’s the *beau* of the family ; he was going to be a linen-draper, but he got a

little too high-minded : after that he was with Mr. Joe Rees, the attorney-man ; then he wanted to go a sojering---and *that* didn't do ; and now, I don't know what'll be. Then Sam is rather mopy ; but he's coming on a little. Then there's Anne, you know ; a nice little boarding-school Miss. She's a pretty little maid ; indeed, all the family are very personable."

You may be sure I did all I could to divert Ponsonby's attention from what was going on, but as I could not stuff cotton in his ears, he must have heard what Mrs. Brett thought proper to say of *you*.

" And so your sister Frances, then, ain't married yet? why I heard she was going to be married a little time back : let me see, who was it to? Mr.---Mr.---Mr.---law, bless me, Mr.---he that was

churchwarden last time I was at Swansea.”

“ Well, and ’twould have been a good match for her,” said Mrs. Jones.

“ Why, and you Miss Eliza,” continued old snuffy, “ were going to be married once, I heard.”

“ Dear Madam,” said I, “ pray be kind enough to favour the company with something more interesting than our family concerns, it can be of little consequence to —.”

I was interrupted by her odious panegyrics.

“ Ah, and your grandfather used to live in the corner house there, by the castle, where the grocer’s shop is, with the sign of the three crows: he was a

kind of haberdasher ; he sold all sorts of things ; and a most respectable man he was ; his word was as good as a bond ; and there you may see his monument in the church with a marble urn at top, just by the christening fount, with these pretty lines :

“ O loving wife and children dear,
Shed not for me another tear ;
For if we do not live in vain,
We all may hope to meet again.
Death would for me no longer wait ;
So here I lie, aged sixty-eight.”

This was a solemn time with me, Fanny ; the uninterrupted attention they paid to Mrs. Brett was excruciating ; and when she paused to take breath my poor empty inside took a fancy to croak, like a nest of young frogs : this was so distressing, that I was thankful when the old chronicler proceeded, with the remainder of the epitaph.

“ He was the affectionatest husband, the tenderest father, the best of brothers, and a sincere friend. He was upright in his dealings, unostentatious in his charity, and ever ready to succour the unfortunate. He served the office of port-reeve for this town, with credit to himself, and to the great satisfaction of the public.”

It was evident, from her tone and manner, that she conceived she was setting off our family to the best advantage, while I felt all the time as if she were flaying me alive.

Ponsonby's call was to take leave, and soon after Mrs. Brett's inimitable recitation he took his departure, politely expressing a hope that we should meet again; but as he is going into Devonshire, and I into Glamorganshire, we

shall literally turn our backs on each other.

E. M.

I have just received a letter from Harriet, with an account of the wedding, &c. she gives me hopes of seeing her at Clifton: that would be delightful! I might, in her company, appear with some little eclat! but then every thing goes so untoward: just as *she* talks of coming, *we* talk of going; and Ponsonby, the only person I feel very anxious should see me in a more elevated point of view leaves Clifton to-morrow, and will probably never know anything more of me than as the grand-daughter of the haberdasher man who sold all sorts of things at the sign of the three crows!

LETTER XI.

Clifton, September.

MY last letter must have crossed your's on the road;---while I think of it, you are not to pay Perkins ; there is a mistake in the note, and he must wait till I return.

Very sincerely do I sympathize with you, my dear Fanny, and enter into all your feelings with regard to Fairford. I have long perceived you have been too much attached to him, to make any advice acceptable that tended to oppose your union ; but I trust my dear sister

will do nothing precipitately. Perhaps Fairford's good conduct, while he is in our neighbourhood, may do something towards obtaining my father's consent: have a little patience, and probably he may soon see things in a different light.

If it were certain that Fairford would come in for a handsome share of his uncle's property, my father could have no objection in a pecuniary point of view; but as the old Fairford has so many nephews and nieces, and one of the nephews being his declared favorite, (to say nothing of *your* Fairford's having offended him,) I should very much fear his expectations from that quarter must be very slender: then my father, having so large a family, cannot, I apprehend, give us much. I am aware that these cold calculations must appear very pitiful, opposed to Fairford's generous dis-

regard of wealth. He is, no doubt, the best judge of his own resources, and perhaps he may have in view some plan for bettering his prospects, which some assistance from my father might very much promote. A little time may bring all parties to a right understanding; and nothing, be assured, would give me so much pleasure. Any thing I can do to serve you, you may depend on.

Mrs. Jones made me hate her all last Wednesday. I just mentioned to her, in Ponsonby's hearing, in a careless manner, that I had a letter from my brother, who was staying at Sir Edwin Frere's; "Ah, so you told me," said she, "and I must say, I am amazed that your father and mother should countenance it. For my part, I think it a thousand pities a young man should keep company with those so *far* above him:---I'm not for *low* company, far from it: but I'd have every

body to keep to their own station. 'It will quite unfit him for home, and for any proper employment; and he's of an unsteady turn, too: I'm afraid he'll turn out wild. Now, Sir, I'll appeal to you, if 'tis n't a foolish thing for a young man like Eddurd Meredith, to be visiting at fine people's houses; getting high notions; and then, when he comes home again, he finds the difference, and perhaps looks down upon his own family, puffed up with pride and conceit, and not fit for any thing. What *good* can it answer? for *my* part, I think it *ridick-lus*." What a nasty temper she must have been in.

Monday.

We have been very dull for these two or three days: the Joneses have settled

to leave this place next Friday, so you may expect to see me by the end of the week.

Wednesday.

Oh, what an extatic change for me! Harriet is arrived! I like Mr. Arthur Bolingbroke most amazingly: he is an elegant figure, with a very fine countenance, and such a gaiety of temper! just the husband for Harriet; a handsome dashing fellow. My dear, I feel an altered creature; my head is all in a whirl. They are at the hotel, and like Clifton so much that they have taken a house in the York Crescent for a month, at ten guineas a week; and the dear creatures are so provoked at the idea of my going so soon, that they have both given me a most pressing invitation to stay with

them. What could I say to this, but consent? though I fear Mrs Jones may take it amiss; for with all her kind-heartedness, she has such uncomfortable ways! and agrees to my staying, so ungraciously. “Oh, certainly, ’tis for you to determine, you know. You are the person it concerns most,” &c. &c. shewing, beyond a doubt, that she is not pleased at the proposal. However, I shall not stand upon fiddle faddle ceremony with her: they may go home without me as soon as they chuse; and “joy go with them,” I was going to add, but I doubt whether there will be any to spare, so much will be left behind.

LETTER XII.

Royal York Crescent.

I HAVE been so occupied the last three or four days, that I have not had time to devote a quarter of an hour to writing. The Joneses went on Friday, and I immediately transferred my happy self from their poking lodging to this elegant abode, and have ever since been out of my wits with delight. Mr. Bolingbroke has been at Clifton several times, and is well acquainted with all the smart people. My dear, I am moving in the higher circles---time flies like wildfire---

every thing is so different to the Joneses little ways.

- Our mornings are spent in taking delightful drives! can you imagine any thing half so pleasant---open carriage, elegant *set-out*---Bolingbroke driving his four beautiful greys: you know he is one of the whip club, I suppose! then, plans for evening parties; return to dress for dinner; sit down, a large party invited that morning, to an elegant dinner at seven o'clock, without Harriet's having any thing more to do with it than one of her company. Then the dresses she has! every thing of mine looks paltry. I've been obliged to buy myself several new things; I shall want some money sadly; tell my father he must advance me my next quarter. Why Tudor, Harriet's maid, goes more handsomely dressed than I do. I have n't a moment to make up any of my things myself: then, Tudor,

when she sees me mending any thing, is so civil, offering to do it for me ; but I'm ashamed to let her see my things : she wouldn't wear them, if I was to give 'em to her : she has a pearl brooch—a very nice patent lace veil, and is continually in silk stockings.

What d'ye think we did the other night ; after being at a smart dinner party, we went for an hour to the ball, picked out about twenty of the choice, took them home to a tasty supper, and danced afterwards till four o'clock.

My dear, I find I'm somebody ! people that took no notice of me, with the Joneses, can now pay me marked attention. Colonel Hartland too, who has met me several times with Ponsonby, but never thought fit to be introduced, *now* thinks to worm himself into my good graces ; and he is such a handsome

wretch, and so completely the fashion, that it won't do for me to shew off any airs ; so I e'en affect to be unconscious of his former slight.

Harriet tells me, she and her aunt Mrs. Daly, are not on terms. She is married, I find, to some low fellow, and is gone to Ireland with him.

Friday.

Only conceive my surprize, Ponsonby is returned ! he met a brother of his at Bath, who was coming to Clifton ; so he changed his plans, and they came on here together.

We dine to day at the Dormers, where I shall probably meet him. He seemed glad to find I was not gone,

and introduced me to his brother, who is very much like him, only not so cheerful a countenance, but a most gentlemanly looking man ; a *leetle* stately.

I'm obliged to let Tudor do so many things for me that I used to do myself, that 'tis quite troublesome ; but I begin to get used to it : she is now putting on a lace to a dress, I'm to dine in to-day at the Dormers. What to give her, when I go, will be such a puzzle.

Saturday.

A very pleasant party : Mrs. Dormer is a charming woman ; plays delightfully ; Harriet and I sang some duets, and Ponsonby, who had never heard me before, seemed much pleased: he has a very

fine voice, and joined us in *The Coronach*.

The Dormers are in delightful lodgings, and have every thing about them that is elegant.

'Twas rather pleasant yesterday morning when I was walking out with Harriet and the Ponsonbys, to meet the Vaughans, who came up and shook hands with me: when they passed, Ponsonby's brother said, he knew some of the family very well: it served to shew him, that I had some genteel acquaintance: the Vaughans are on their way to Bath.

E. M.

LETTER XIII.

Swansea, September.

I FEEL a relief in writing to my dear sister on a subject on which I need good advice. Our attachment has been announced to my father in due form; and he has solemnly set his face against it. Fairford, as you may suppose, is not a little irritated at my father's treatment of him; for he told him flatly that he had been clandestinely seeking my hand; and almost turned him out of the house. I quite feel for poor Fairford; he is, I do think, the best creature in the world; the sweetest temper: but he has a little

pride, and no doubt feels some resentment towards my father, for receiving the proposals of a man of some family, and very well connected, as an affront.

I know not what to say to Fairford; he has again urged a private marriage; and he is so tenderly attached, I feel I ought not to hesitate in becoming his wife: then how are we to live?—but if he is satisfied with our humble means, why should I murmur.—He talks so enchantingly of love and a cottage, that I almost despise myself for ever indulging those fond dreams of greatness which we have so often pictured to our sanguine hopes. May you, my dear sister, find them realized; and though an humble cottage shelters me, yet, blessed with my beloved Fairford, I shall not repine.

I fear my father will not relent : what shall I do—the regiment is ordered to distant quarters ; and it may be a long, a very long time, ere I see Fairford again :—do advise your ever affectionate

FRANCES MEREDITH.

Whatever the advice was that Elizabeth gave, her sister took the step that was to colour her future life ; and she became the wife of Wyndham Fairford.

Little did either of them know of their own tempers ; still less of each others'. To Fanny, Fairford appeared every thing amiable ; while he, fancying himself in love, and ever accustomed to indulge inordinate self-will, had not be-

stowed a thought on the consequences that might ensue.

Fanny at first felt some uneasiness and compunction at the step she had taken ; but these feelings were soon worn away in the novelty of the scenes in which she had now to appear. The regiment was under orders for Chichester ; and after spending a week at Southampton, Fairford took his bride to join his regiment. Here she excited much admiration, and soon recovered her spirits.

Elizabeth received the intelligence of her sister's marriage with some surprize ; for though she was pretty well aware that Fanny's prudence would make but a poor stand against the tender persuasions of her lover, yet she had no reason to expect so sudden a decision.

Extraordinary things, however, soon cease to be considered as such ; and after a few letters had passed between the sisters on the subject of this marriage, Elizabeth continued her correspondence as if nothing had happened.

LETTER XIV.

Clifton, October.

MY DEAR FANNY,

I HAVE had an answer to the letter I wrote my mother in your behalf, and she says she has done and said every thing in her power to bring my father to a reconciliation ; but there is no hope of it at present : I trust, however, his resentment will not be of long duration.

I find Maria Shirley is gone home ; a melancholy return for her, I fear. I feel very much for her : she is a sweet

girl, and deserves a better fate than to be buried alive where she is gone. I really do think it would have been a very desirable match for her, if she could have made up her mind to Mr. Jolliffe. She certainly has no dislike to Mr. Worthington, but I trust she will not be so foolish as to discourage all others for such a forlorn hope.

My mother says, Mrs. Jones did not in her heart, seem to be at all pleased at my staying here : for as I had come with her, she said, so I ought to have returned with her ; and now that I was got among a new set of people, she supposed all the pleasure of the excursion which she had given me, would all go for nothing!—Mamma assured her that it would never be forgotten. “ Ah, well,” she said, she hoped I should find it as pleasant as I seemed to expect, but thought I might be disappointed ; for in her

opinion, a little sober enjoyment was worth all the racketting in the world. Thank ye, *Ma'am Jones*, but our ideas are as wide apart as the poles; so no more of your sobriety for *me*: I am just recovering the specimen you favoured me with, and I have a shrewd notion a little racketting is the only thing wanting to set me up.

We went to the play on Monday: took a whole box; and our dashing party was more looked at than the actors. We made a noisy exit in the middle of the last act:—did we go quietly home to our beds?—no;—'twas only the beginning of the evening with us! we ~~altered~~ altered our dress, and away we drove to a private ball, at Lady Bellinghurst's. Ponsoby danced with me *twice* in the course of the evening. We had excellent music; sumptuous supper; dancing kept up till five o'clock, when an ele-

gant breakfast detained us till past six. Lady Bellinghurst is a most fascinating woman: she talks of giving a masquerade.

We made a party to go down the river the day before yesterday; the Harringtons, Lady Bellinghurst, and ourselves, including the two Ponsonbys, and a few select amiables in scarlet; and a delightful day we had:—the Dormers were not of the party; Lady Anne, it seems, does not like meeting Lady Bellinghurst. Harriet says she is exquisitely starchified. Two boats accompanied us, one with a military band, the other with servants and a plentiful supply of prog. Nothing ever went off so well. We landed at Portishead, and found ourselves quite ready for an early dinner: after which, was an elegant dessert: delicious fruit, champagne, burgundy, &c. &c. We rambled about the

woods while the band and servants were regaling themselves, and having found a pleasant spot for a dance, the music was summoned, and played some beautiful waltzes, which we all entered into with great spirit. It was quite romantic I assure you, and Lady Bellinghurst thought the men could do no less than fall in love with us: indeed, if nothing is to be put down to the sociality of the party, I should be almost tempted to give myself credit for having made some impression on Frederick Ponsonby: his attentions are certainly particular; but considering how very small my pretensions are to a man of his family, my pride will not suffer me to regard him in any other light, than a most agreeable acquaintance. We returned home about eight, and attracted a great deal of notice as we sailed up the river, under the rocks at Clifton, singing glees, &c.

Louis Ponsonby improves upon acquaintance ; I like him very much.

Tuesday.

We are going to the ball to-night ; Harriet wears an exquisite white lace dress over pink satin, while I, in an immaculate white sarcenet, have no intention of being overlooked. She is all life and spirits, and never looked better. Bolingbroke seems very fond of her, and spares no expense to make her happy : but if they go on at this rate, I fear they will soon run out of her fortune, which I find was not quite fifteen thousand pounds. They are both, I must say, shockingly extravagant : now, for all she has such a complete stock of elegant and costly things of every description, she buys any new expensive article that

happens to strike her fancy, without a moment's hesitation, or even asking the price ; while I stand deliberating on the expenditure of a pound, as if I had not another in the world. The dear creature has given me a pearl cross, and the sweetest white lace veil !

A new carriage is just arrived from town, of the most novel construction ; and we are so diverted at seeing the people stop to wonder at it, and to examine the springs, &c. Harriet knows the name of every part ; and *I* begin to have some notion of patent axle-trees, and so forth. Bolingbroke is a capital whip ; we fly like the wind, and twirl a corner within a hair's breadth of our lives.

We are full of engagements ; continual dinner parties ; which are conducted here quite in the Stapylton style. We

dine about seven, and Harriet and I generally have some evening party to go to, and leave the men to their claret.

Wednesday.

The ball was well attended ; and Ponsonby was more marked in his attentions than ever. We are so often together, and so constantly does he endeavour to engross my conversation, that I am tempted to flatter myself he does not appear in our party by accident. I have already been joked by Harriet about my conquest. Perhaps your curiosity may be raised to know something of the Ponsonby family : (the name is delightful !) their seat is in Essex, and the family consists of Mr. and Mrs. Ponsonby, the two sons whom I have mentioned ; an elder brother, who is in parliament, and is

married to a daughter of Sir Reginald de Grey ; and five daughters ; two of whom are married ; one to a gentleman of large fortune in Hertfordshire : the other is Lady Kingsbury.

To make amends for this short letter, I enclose you one I received from Edward some time ago, which, as I have a frank, will only cost you the trouble of reading.

Your's ever,

E. M.

LETTER XV.

Llandovelly Castle, September.

MY DEAR SISTER,

THOUGH a letter from me, I flatter myself is at all times acceptable, yet I've a notion, you will not like it the less, on account of its being dated from the mansion of Sir Edwin Frere, Bart. Henry Frere and I became such friends at Tenby, that he insisted on my paying him a visit at this delightful place. The house is modern, but having been built on the site of an ancient fortress, it retains the name of Llandovelly castle, which I think

injudicious, as it leads people to form an erroneous idea of the place. There is an extensive park, and the grounds are laid out with much taste. The Freres live in a first-rate style: they have a few other friends at the house, and there are several people of distinction in the neighbourhood, so that we are in no want of society, and I don't know a place where a young man of fortune could pass his time more pleasantly; but though there is no kind of formality tolerated here, and every attention is paid to me that good breeding can suggest, I don't feel myself quite at home. The very high style in which these people live, is, I must confess, rather oppressive: it requires a great deal of self-respect to overcome the want of equality, and I cannot help now and then construing civility into condescension.

Mr. Holford, who is at the house, was

at the same college at Oxford with Henry Frere, and two Mr. Leslies, who live near us, were at Christ Church, and when they all meet, the conversation continually turns on college topics, which leaves me out of the question ; for never having put my foot in Oxford, I dare not utter a word for fear of betraying the truth.

Then I find I must be so much more of a sportsman than I've really any inclination to be, that it's quite perplexing ; for knowing nothing of the matter, and not having divulged that I never fired a gun in my life, they torture me with questions, I don't know the meaning of. I've as yet confessed nothing more than that I'm a poor shot.

Fishing has been lately all the fashion with them, which to me is an amusement, of all others, the most tiresome.

I hate to sit forlorn for half the day on the bank of a sedgy stream, while every lout that passes by, thinks he has a right to say, "any sport, Sir?" and on returning home, again to undergo the same inquiry, and confess you have caught nothing, or produce a tiny gudgeon or two, that you would not have crossed the road for.

Then though I feel there is always a horse at my service, it is not like having one of my own. The young men who visit here, have all their horses, and carriages of some sort or other; of course talk a great deal about them, and frequently address me as if I had several. I admired, one day, a horse of Charles Leslie's, "Do you like her," said he, "she's a capital goer, and I'll let you have her a bargain." I felt awkward, for the consciousness of my having no intention of buying the horse, (which I wished not to betray), made me feel quite at

a loss what reply to make: a person to whom it was a matter of indifference, would have said yes or no without embarrassment, while I declined his offer, blushing as if I had committed a crime. I cannot get rid of blushing.

Then because my good looking person appears in a gentleman's clothes, (for I've had a suit from London), I can perceive I excite a sensation among the belles, as I come into the ball-room at Llandovelly, arm in arm with Henry Frere: of course my name is asked, which tells no tales; but if further inquiry penetrates into family and fortune, it's all over with me.

Soon after my coming here, I experienced a most flattering reception from some ladies to whom I was introduced by Lady Frere, as a particular friend of her son's; but at the next ball they ma-

nifested evident signs of their having discovered that I was a nobody ; and therefore seemed to think it necessary to convert their good humoured familiarity into freezing politeness, lest I should have the temerity to ask them to dance. Not that I cared whether they liked me or not ; but it is not agreeable for other persons to witness one's receiving a slight of this kind. " 'Twas just like them ;" Philip Leslie said. " So *very* particular—." Then checking himself, he added, " I'm sure I can't imagine, what the devil they meant."

It is not, however, unamusing to observe the adoration paid by certain young ladies to rank and riches ; and Henry Frere told me a capital hoax he played off on some girls at Tenby. He was at the ball ; and soon afterwards Lord Meynell and Mr. Euston entered the room

together: the latter a most elegant and accomplished young man, but alas! only a curate: Lord Meynell a man of mean appearance, and of no very shining qualities; what you'd call a *poor creature*. Inquiries about them were immediately made, and Henry Frere made a party of ladies believe that his lordship was Mr. Euston; and Mr. Euston Lord Meynell: the consequence was, the latter was extravagantly admired, while the imaginary curate was loaded with abuse: all eyes turned from so pitiful a figure, seeking to engage the notice of the interesting young peer. The mistake was presently cleared up; wonderments followed how it arose. Henry attributed it entirely to the ladies *choosing* that a lord should be handsome, and wishing it so much, that they *would* have it so. It took some little time to overcome the disappointment, but before the evening was over,

the very girls, who had so despised and even ridiculed "*the pitiful looking fellow of a curate,*" were seen dancing with him with undisguised delight ; and all the recommendation now bestowed on poor Mr. Euston was, that he was a friend of Lord Meynell's.

At Tenby, Henry and I used to take excursions on the water continually; there, I always took the lead; but here there is no amusement of that kind, and my consequence dwindles apace; yet to do Henry justice, he is uniformly attentive and friendly: but I have not found it so pleasant since a Mr. De Grey has been here: one of your cool, sarcastic tempers; I know he's on the watch for every little flaw, and takes delight in seeing me embarrassed. I made a sad blunder at Mr. Noel Drummond's, where we dined; conceiving I was desired to sit

next Lady Frere, I thought I could not shew my good breeding better than by instantly obeying the summons. When the mischief was done, I found myself in the seat intended for Bishop Forster. Nothing I could do, could undo this, so I felt all dinner time like a fool in a chair of state. I shall never forget De Grey's smile. I can't bear him. The other day Charles Leslie offered me a bet, which I, not having learnt to say "no" with a good grace, inadvertently accepted; had you heard the clamour that was made, you would have pitied me: they wondered where my senses were, as I was sure to lose. De Grey insisted on my being let off; "'twould be a ridiculous take in," he said; with a look and tone as if he thought me a simpleton. Charles Leslie assured me he should not think of my taking the bet, leaving me the perplexing alternative of continuing the simpleton, or

running the risk of being thought a sneaking fellow. I wished myself a hundred miles off; but durst not leave them together, for fear they should talk me over. If De Grey was not going in a day or two, I should certainly shorten my visit; but as it is, I shall probably stay here about a fortnight longer, and then return home, where perhaps you will be by that time; however, whether at home or abroad,

I am,

Your's affectionately,

EDWARD MEREDITH.

To-morrow we are all going out shooting;—prepare yourself for reading in the newspapers, “*that a young gentleman, in company with the only son of Sir*

Edwin Frere, Bart. by misadventure in firing his fowling-piece, shot his friend through the heart, and is since running about the country stark mad."

LETTER XVI.

Chichester, October.

MY DEAR ELIZABETH,

I AM quite ashamed to have been so long without writing, but my engagements have been innumerable. I hope, however, you got the last letter I wrote you from Southampton. I wrote my mother by the same post.

I suppose you will expect to have some account of the new life I am leading, and a most delightful one it is; and you and I, who had so lately to compare

notes of vexation and dulness, now seem to vie with each other in gaiety.

Fairford is so kind and attentive, he anticipates every wish; and the society I am in is so agreeable, that if you were not so pleasantly situated, I should persuade you to come and lose your heart to some of the smart beaux by whom I am surrounded. I am on an intimate footing with Mrs. Follett, the Lieut.-Colonel's lady, and a most charming woman; she is a daughter of General Pember-ton: in consequence of her introduction, some very genteel families have called on me.

We made a large party to a ball at Arundel last week, where, as a bride, I was complimented with the top-place, and led off with Major Osborne, a very pleasant dashing man. He drove me yesterday in his tandem to a Roman en-

campment, by way of something to see: we were a large party; Mr. Brathwayte and Captain Bingham went with us, and Miss Pemberton, Mrs. Follett's sister.

There was not much to see I thought, but we contrived to amuse ourselves by stopping at a neat little cottage, where we insisted on having some tea. This created no little confusion, as the men would on no account suffer the old woman of the house to do any thing herself; they put the kettle on the fire, and began rummaging her cupboards for every thing they wanted; then went into her dairy, and brought out all the butter and cream, greatly to the annoyance of our little hostess. Our tea-drinking was the most diverting sight imaginable; one continual roar of laughter; and the inclination for frolic increasing, they began demolishing cups, saucers, chairs, tables, and every thing they could lay their

hands on, and then proposed making a bonfire of the house; the woman all the while vehemently protesting against such outrage; and at length dropt on her knees, entreating them to spare her. I must say they carried the joke a little too far; but they gave her money enough to pay for the damage twice over.

I mustn't forget the races about a week ago, which was the gayest scene I ever witnessed. Mrs. Follett took me in her barouche, and I wore my white satin spencer. There were a great many handsome elegant women on the ground, and smart men innumerable. I was introduced to Sir Francis Wynyard: and who should I see but Mr. Dashwood; he was on horseback, and came up to the barouche to speak to me: 'twas pleasant enough for him to see me with Mrs. Follett, he was at the ball in the evening, and asked me to dance, but I was en-

gaged to Sir F. Wynyard. I couldn't help thinking of our Swansea balls, where I would have given my eyes to have danced with him. I shall never forget the impertinence of Mr. Torrens, after standing talking to me for some time at that party at the Vaughan's last year, drawling out, "Why don't you dance to-night?" I would willingly have paid a man for knocking him down: however, that's all over now; I've no longer the dread of Dick Pratten's, "Well, if you don't get a better partner, *I* shall be happy to dance with'e; or odious Davy Jenkins sidling up, and never taking an answer, but going on, trying "for the two, *after* the two next;" and so on, wearing one to a thread paper—here it's a different affair; I've more partners than I know what to do with, as most of *our* officers engage me beforehand, and I've only to manœuvre to secure the best.

Last Thursday I was at a most elegant ball at Mrs. (Gen.) Barker's. I wore a very pretty French silk that Fairford gave me, and he has made me a present of a brooch, something like the one we admired on Miss Stapylton. I danced after supper with Lord Donovan: he is in the light dragoons, and introduced several of the officers to me. They are going to give a gay ball at their barracks, which I expect will be every thing delightful; they are ornamenting the rooms, and making great preparations.

Brathwayte wants me to ride a horse of his, which, he says, is just the thing for a lady; but as I've no habit, I pretended I was too great a coward to venture, which is perhaps as well; for if I expressed a wish to ride, Fairford would, I believe, be extravagant enough to purchase a horse for me.

I am very glad you like your quarters so well, you seem to have a gay time of it. I often wish for you at some of our parties: you would enjoy our sudden freaks—flying off to a ball eighteen miles distant, and coming home by daylight to a merry breakfast. Every day produces some new amusement, and we are always planning how to kill time in the most agreeable manner: then the band, which is a very good one, plays every evening, so that the promenade is thronged with fashionables. The light dragoons are a great addition, though some of Fairford's regiment are very dashing men, and would be quite Harriet's adorables. Captain Amherst says he saw her at Cheltenham with Mrs. Daly last year, and admired her extremely.

We have pretty lodgings, very pleasantly situated; last night Colonel and Mrs. Follett spent the evening with us,

and we gave a genteel slight supper, and had a very merry noisy evening. Miss Pemberton and I sang several duets, and Brathwayte gave us some of his comic songs, and mimicked some of the actors, which he does admirably. Capt. and Mrs. Gifford were of the party : he is an immense red-faced man ; it would be a good quarter of a mile to walk round him ; she is a little spare quizzical looking dame, with a face like whity-brown paper, but was literally worth her weight in gold. Imagine them sitting opposite each other at supper, and singing an ancient duet in the tones of the blind fiddler and his wife, that used to go about the streets of Swansea : it was impossible to keep one's countenance ; especially to see the grimaces some of the men made ; one or two of them burst into audible laughter. I was afraid old Gifford would have noticed it, but he is a good-natured creature, and is often made

butt of without minding it. He afterwards favoured us with a derry-down, extending to about a hundred and fifty verses. Arbuthnot affected to be fast asleep at the other end of the table, and tied a handkerchief round his head by way of a night cap.

We are going to the Folletts to-night, in the same free way.

I am afraid Edward is making a fool of himself: I wish he was settled. I find he is gone to Tenby again, to renew his attack, I suppose, on the lady with the twenty thousand pounds.

Let me hear from you soon, and give my love to Harriet.

Brathwayte will take this to Petworth, and get it franked by Col. Lyons; so you see *I* can get franks as well as you.

F. FAIRFORD.

28th October.

It was not my intention that you should be so long deprived of this precious morceau ; however, I shall now be able to give you some account of the dear ball, for in the middle of supper, Brathwayte produced from his pocket my poor letter, which had been in snug quarters there ever since the 20th, somewhat the worse for wear, and rather *snuffy*, as you may perceive : however, he rode over this morning with the frank.

The ball was delightful ; opened by Lord Donovan and the honourable Mrs. Lyons (wife of the colonel of the regiment). She is an excellent dancer, and waltzed after supper. I danced a great deal, and had a very pleasant evening. There was a most elegant supper, and we kept it up till daylight.

I must leave off now, as Fairford is come to take me with a party to see the conjurer.

E. F.

LETTER XVII.

Clifton, Monday.

MANY thanks, my dear Fanny, for your entertaining letter: I fear I shall make but a poor return; for though there has been no lack of gaiety here, yet it all gives place to more important consideration.

Frederick's attentions must certainly mean something more than the passing gallantry of the moment: in short, I have no doubt of his attachment: his brother has left Clifton, and there appears to be no reason for his staying,

unless it is his wish to pursue his attentions where my heart would give a ready welcome: but I cannot believe, I can ever be so fortunate as to be placed in that delightful sphere, which we have both sketched with so much rapture. There are, however, some drawbacks: the estate of course goes to the eldest son; Frederick has little independently of his father. He has been rather fickle in his plans, but is now studying the law, which I never should have guessed, and only heard yesterday by mere accident. I fancy he does little more than what is called keeping his terms.

Thursday.

What I scarcely dared to hope has actually happened. Frederick has made

me an offer:—and now I am so afraid that fathers and mothers will put their wise heads together to break off the match, that I can't sit still a moment, and feel, very much as you did, when you couldn't eat: he has written to his father, and an answer is daily expected, which keeps me in such a state of suspense, it's absolutely torture—I don't at all expect that they will approve of the match, yet I cannot give up all hope, and when for a moment or two something diverts the subject from my thoughts, it returns with such a bolt upon me, that my heart seems turned inside out.

I have by this post written to my mother, to acquaint her with what has passed: all this seems like a dream; I can hardly believe it true.

E. M.

Mr. and Mrs. Ponsonby had suffered much uneasiness on account of Frederick's character: the changeableness of his pursuits, and an aptitude he had shewn to fall in love, had been a constant source of alarm. He had more than once terrified them with the prospect of his forming a very low connexion, but never, until the present occasion, had his partiality assumed so decided an appearance of his being in earnest, nor had the subject ever come so seriously before them. They knew he was not of a temper to be trifled with; and as they were far from disapproving, without knowing something more of his choice, Mr. Ponsonby wrote to a friend of his in Glamorganshire, requesting him to make enquiries respecting Mr. Meredith's family, &c.

The Miss Merediths had gained the reputation of being beautiful and accom-

plished young women ; Mr. Meredith was spoken of as a man of great respectability, and this account was forwarded to Mr. Ponsonby.

In the meantime, Louis Ponsonby arrived at Woodsbourne, and spoke in high terms of Elizabeth, so that Mr. and Mrs. Ponsonby began to view their son's marriage with abated uneasiness : they even endeavoured to extract some advantage from it ; and indulged a hope that by marrying, his habits would acquire a steadiness, which was all they considered wanting to second his naturally good abilities, in the profession to which he had at length made up his mind.

Mr. Ponsonby's letter to Frederick was penned with much judgment : he complimented his son on his good sense ; was satisfied his choice must be such as would give them all much pleasure, and

that it was not made without serious reflection: without charging his son with instability, he represented the necessity there would be for his giving that attention to his profession, which was requisite to its proving lucrative, which was a point not to be overlooked, as it was not in his power to grant him an independence.

Frederick, who was thoroughly in love, hastened to communicate the purport of this letter to Elizabeth, and wrote to Mr. Meredith for his approbation.

Elizabeth was the happiest of women: she had a real regard for Frederick, and the height of her ambition was gratified in marrying a man of family, and in being placed in a decided circle of fashion.

Mrs. Bolingbroke participated in her

friend's prospect of happiness, and they talked of nothing but wedding clothes, new fashions and equipage, from the time Mr. Ponsonby's consent had been communicated, to the day Elizabeth left Clifton for Swansea. The Bolingbroke's accompanied her to the New Passage, where Mr. Meredith met her, and it was settled that Frederick should first pay his father a visit, and then fly to receive his bride.

CHAP. VI.

ELIZABETH MEREDITH returned home, her heart swelling with a consciousness of the importance which the prospect of her marriage would give her among her acquaintance; and as Ponsonby was very soon expected, she and her mother busied themselves in setting off the house to the best advantage. The drawing-room it was determined should be used every day; also the best china, and a variety of other arrangements were made to give him a favourable idea of their style of living.

The wedding clothes too, now claimed no small share of attention, and with so recent a precedent still present to her imagination, Elizabeth could scarcely be contented with any thing short of a wardrobe similar to Mrs. Arthur Bolingbroke's.

Ponsonby arrived sooner than he was expected, and of course met with a very gracious reception from Mr. and Mrs. Meredith; the youngest son and daughter were all that were at home, besides Elizabeth, and they were on their good behaviour. The next day the married brother and his wife were introduced: they were both well-bred in their manners, and Elizabeth felt there was nothing Ponsonby had as yet seen in her family, for her to be ashamed of. It afforded her no little gratification to appear on the public walk accompanied by Ponsonby; but it was vexing that

the Vaughans and Stapyltons were at this time absent, and she suffered perpetual mortifications at his having to see the odd-looking people she was obliged to bow to. She luckily escaped meeting her cousins ; but lest any accident should bring them face to face, she thought it best to prepare Ponsonby for such a rencontre, and therefore hinted, that unfortunately there were a few, rather distant relations of her father's, living in Swansea ; “ disagreeable people,” she said, “ but we have very little to do with them, and you may very probably not see them.” It had indeed been settled between Elizabeth and her mother, that the Prattens and Dowlings were to be kept entirely out of sight ; but Mrs. Pratten had decided it otherwise ; and burning with curiosity to obtain a sight of Elizabeth's *intended*, she and Rebecca Dowling paid an unwelcome visit in the afternoon to Mrs.

Meredith, who was so provoked, that she scarcely spoke civilly to them, and had no intention of introducing them to Ponsonby. Mr. Meredith, however, took upon him to perform this ceremony, and as Mrs. Pratten and Mr. Dowling were his first cousins, he thought it proper to add that the ladies were relations of his.

Ponsonby bowed to them.

Mrs. Pratten appeared in high spirits, and assured him she was very glad to see him in Swansea, with a look and voice, evidently referring to the occasion of his coming.

Rebecca ventured to enquire whether he had ever been there before, and finding he had not, she began mentioning some places he ought to see.

“ Oh, never you trouble your head about that,” said Mrs. Pratten, with a simper; “ he has enough to amuse him just now I fancy, without rambling about to see sights.”

Ponsonby, to prevent a continuance of an allusion, which he perceived distressed Elizabeth, remarked, that the country had very much interested him, and he should be glad to have an opportunity of seeing more of it.

“ Oh, well, if that’s the case Sir, I don’t know where you’d be better off; for Betsey Meredith knows all the fine people hereabouts: ’tis a pity your brother Ned isn’t here Betsey, he would have been a nice companion for Mr. Ponsonby to ride out with, and to shew him about; but my sons, I’m sure, will be very happy, Sir, to offer their services;

only 'tis a very busy time with them just now, and I'm afraid they can't be very well spared; however, we'll see about it, I expect them here, by and by, to see us home."

"There will be no occasion," replied Mrs. Meredith, "for the Mr. Prattens to put themselves to any inconvenience, Mr. Meredith will accompany Mr. Ponsonby."

Some inquiry on an indifferent subject, then, passing between Mrs. Pratten and Mrs. Meredith, Elizabeth endeavoured to put a stop to any further conversation between Ponsonby and Mrs. Pratten. She would willingly have taken him out of hearing, had the dimensions of the room permitted it, but where they stood, Mrs. Pratten's whispers to Mrs. Meredith were cruelly audible.

“ ’Tis to take place very soon, I suppose—I like him very much ; he seems to be a very nice genteel young man.”

All this reached Ponsonby, besides the comforting assurance from Rebecca, that he was “ *quite* the gentleman.”

“ But bless us !” cried Mrs. Pratten, “ I don’t see any signs of tea ; and it’s past seven ; I thought I should have just nickt it ; I hope ’t isn’t over ?”

“ Oh, no,” said Mrs. Meredith coolly, “ we don’t drink tea till eight.”

“ Hoity, toity ! why then you’ve altered your hours finely ; it used to be at six o’clock ; then ’twas at half past, and now we’re come to eight ! why where’ll it end ?” said she laughing.

“ We must, you know Mrs. Pratten,”

said Mr. Meredith, "conform a little to fashion in these times."

"Oh, certainly—Well, Betsey, your excursion turned out very pleasant, eh? ah, I told Mrs. Jones, when she came back without you, I thought there was something in it—and 'tis droll enough," continued she, addressing herself to Mr. Meredith, "'twas at Bristol, you know, I got *mine*—dear me, to think how time runs on—that's five and twenty year ago: have you many friends in Bristol, Mr. Ponsonby?"

"No Ma'am; I was at Clifton."

"Oh, well, Sir, that's almost the same, for I'am told the buildings are increased so, 'tis amazing! but I suppose you went to see the glass-houses, and Rackly church—that's you know, where Chatterton, that was such a wonderful

genius, you know, found the curious poems—there's the very boxes to be seen there now, in a dismal odd sort of room to be sure;—but 'tis a very fine old church: I was at a friend's very near it on Rackly Parade, a few years ago, a very nice house—three windows in front."

" Ah, that Chatterton," said Ponsonby, " has excited a great deal of controversy, among the antiquarians; and I believe the point is not very well cleared up—but most likely, he found some part and forged the remainder—pray which side of the question do you espouse, Mrs. Pratten?"

" Why, indeed, Sir," said that lady, evidently not understanding the subject, " I hardly know what to think; he certainly must have been a very clever

young man; and I've heard people there say, they had seen him!!”

“ Oh, that might very well be the case;” observed Mrs. Meredith.

“ True,” returned Mrs. Pratten, “ but ’t isn’t every one can boast of seeing such great characters.”

“ He was a singular character,” said Mrs. Meredith.

“ Well, I don’t know what *you* think of him,” cried Mrs. Pratten, “ but I’m sure when I was at Mrs. Baker’s, they talked of nothing else for a whole evening; and I’m sure they all seemed to think him a very fine poet: there was Mr. Jackson there, a very clever man, perhaps you may know him Mr. Ponsonby, for I hear he lives at Clifton now, and has quite left off business.”

Mr. Ponsonby said, he knew but few of the residents.

“ Well, you cared little for that I suppose, as you met with such agreeable chance acquaintance, eh ?”

In spite of Mrs. Meredith’s endeavours to avoid every topic which might afford an allusion to her daughter’s engagement to Ponsonby, Mrs. Pratten was ingenious enough to bring the subject continually in view ; and taking the opportunity of Mr. Meredith’s leaving the room, she inquired in an undertone, but with a good deal of earnestness, after Mrs. Fairford, evidently betraying that it was a forbidden subject ; and as Ponsonby had heard nothing further of the affair, than that Miss Meredith had been lately married to a Captain Fairford, he could not account

for the air of mystery which accompanied Mrs. Pratten's inquiries.

A knock at the door having announced Mrs. Pratten's sons, they were now heard whispering and sniggering on the stairs.

"Law, they don't like to come in," cried Mrs. Pratten—"Is that you, Dick? Come in, what are you afraid of?"

They entered; two slovenly gawkies, about eighteen and nineteen, dressed in the extreme of an exploded fashion; the eldest seemed to have been pushed in by his brother; both appeared overwhelmed with confusion, and not knowing what they said, they came up to Ponsonby, and with an uncouth grin, wished him joy.

Mrs. Meredith tried to relieve the awkwardness that seemed to prevail, and hoped the young men had found the ball pleasant the other night.

Yes, they said, 'twas very well, only not many of their acquaintance there ; but 'twas a very smart ball though.

“ Oh, I don't know what the balls will do without Betsey Meredith,” cried Mrs. Pratten. “ I do assure you Mr. Ponsonby, you're going to take away one of our choice belles.”

Ponsonby could do no less than appear gratified, and politely insinuated, that there would be no want of beauty at the assemblies where Miss Dowling appeared.

“ You're very complaisant, Sir ; Becky has her share ; but she don't pretend to

come up to her cousin. Oh, now about taking Mr. Ponsonby to see Britton Ferry and the Mumbles; I dare say Dick, you could be spared for a day, and you could borrow that horse you know that John Brown had ;” and then, without waiting for Ponsonby’s assent to their plans, a sort of conference passed between Mrs. Pratten and her sons, as to the best place for procuring a similar accommodation for Ponsonby, which Mrs. Meredith interrupted by intimating that Mr. Ponsonby had his curricule.

“ Oh, then to be sure, that alters the case ; why then they could go in it together, couldn’t they ? but then, perhaps, he’d rather have Betsey, eh ? and Dick could follow on horseback.”

“ I believe it had better be deferred,” said Mrs. Meredith ; “ there will be other opportunities.”

“ True; yes to be sure,” returned Mrs. Pratten winking; “ there’s no hurry certainly; he’ll be coming here often, I hope: the oftener the better. Dear me! I think I hear pattens: did you bring umbrellas with you? what sort of evening is it?”

“ Oh, I don’t know,” said Dick Pratten; “ it doesn’t rain; nothing to signify.”

“ It just spits,” added his brother.

“ Law, *bless* me, Jem, where have you been to get such a coat as that; the back of it is all over chalk, or something.”

“ Oh, I suppose, ’twas in the warehouse, against the casks.”

You ought both of you to have gone

home, and made yourselves a little decent. I *do* like to see young men clean and tidy; they can't look like gentlefolks if they aren't: it's what I'm continually telling them of. I'm sure, if you couldn't make yourselves look a little better than you do this evening, I shouldn't have thought of proposing for you to ride out with Mr. Ponsonby: such figures as you are; why, you aren't fit to be seen; you aren't, indeed."

"We thought we should be too late."

"Nonsense."

Mr. Meredith having returned to the room, some conversation relative to business was now carried on between him and Dick Pratten, in language so laconic and technical as to be wholly unintelligible to the rest of the party. Most of

what they said was in an under-voice : the following broken sentences were distinguished. “ So, I find the Endeavour, Tucker, is cleared out ; were those crates in time ? ” “ Which uns ? ” “ E. diamond L. and G. crowfoot H M.” “ Oh, iss sure, and we got the drawback allowed.” “ Is she covered ? what was she done at ? ” “ Two and a half ; I told him it couldn’t be done under.”

Mrs. Pratten interrupted them with, “ Well, if it don’t rain, I’ll wish you a good night, good people all : fetch my shawl, Dick ; good folks are scarce.”

The next day Elizabeth had a visit from Mrs. Jones, who told her she had met Mr. Ponsonby that morning.

“ Only think,” cried Mrs. Jones, “ of his popping upon me just as I was coming from market. I wasn’t dressed as I

could have wished ; and the girl was behind me with the meat ; and then, who should come up but Miss Owen, giggling and telling me I had a hole in my stocking ; so unpleasant, and so vulgar, I thought : and there she walked on with us, and began talking to Mr. Ponsonby ; so odd, for I never introduced her : I shouldn't have thought of such a thing. Then she made out as if she was very intimate with you, and that you had laid a wager which should be married first ; and so she said, as she found she was like to lose her wager, she expected to have a bit of wedding-cake to dream upon ; so forward ! I was quite disgusted with her : I can't bear any thing like boldness ; I'm very particular in that respect : and what I always admired in you Lizzy, was, that with all your gaiety there was never any mixture of low-bred ways, nothing forward ; now I can't but say I admired your behaviour

that night at the Clifton ball, when you danced with that officer, you know: why there's many a girl would have jumped at a red coat; but I noticed to Mr. Jones how properly you behaved; you shewed quite a dignity in your manner, that pleased me very much; and I couldn't help just speaking of it to Mr. Ponsonby, —."

" Dear Ma'am, I wish ——."

" Well, my dear, I said no harm, nor nothing you need be vexed at; 'twas after Miss Owen had left us, and I told him you were a very different kind of young woman from her: I was just got home then, so I asked him in; (I shewed him into the best parlour), and while he was waiting to see Mr. Jones, he and I had a bit of chat together, and got very sociable; and I assure'e Lizzy, he won upon me very much: and I tell'e what,

I've asked him to supper ; for I wished, as he had seen us in such a little lodging at Clifton, that he should find we lived somewhat in a different style at home ; we don't give dinners I told him, but we hoped to see him some evening with your family ; so I've settled the matter with your father, and we shall expect you all next Friday."

CHAP VII.

ELIZABETH looked forwards with no little dread to the proposed evening party: it was her earnest hope that there might be no other company; but on entering Mrs. Jones's "best parlour," the first objects that presented themselves were the Pratten family and Miss Dowling: with their best clothes, they had put on their best behaviour, and sat up in solemn array.

Mrs. Jones took an opportunity of observing to Elizabeth, "I know your

mother don't much like the Prattens, and it was quite against my wish their being asked; but there, Mr. Jones made a point of it; he said we should be obliged to give a handsome supper, and we might as well have a few more, particularly as we owed the Prattens; so there what could I do. I only intended to have Mr. and Mrs. Mainwaring: I thought they would be genteel people for Mr. Ponsonby to meet, as they keep their own carriage, you know, and live in a handsome way."

Elizabeth gave Mrs. Jones full credit for her good intentions, but was far from subscribing to the notion that gentility was necessarily annexed to the possession of Plâs Llancoed, and a well filled purse.

Mrs. Mainwaring had been, at nineteen, the beauty of her native village: she had re-

turned home from a neighbouring boarding-school, little incommoded with accomplishments, and plentifully supplied with personal vanity. Her taste for reading led her to explore her father's bookshelves, but they only excited her disgust; not so a snug little shop in the village, where, besides millinery, grocery, crockery, and perfumery, the public might be accommodated with certain marble-covered tomes, at the rate of two-pence per volume; these were eagerly devoured by Miss Letitia, who now began to deplore the monotony of a life, which seemed to preclude the possibility of a romantic adventure falling to her share, and regretted that it had not been her good fortune to have been left at the door a helpless infant, wrapt in an embroidered mantle, some cold December night. Such a circumstance would have been the solace of her lonely hours; but alas! nothing could be more certain, than

that she was the daughter of Matthew Lampet, whose name glittered in gold letters over his door, with the addition of " Surgeon, Apothecary, and Man-midwife ;" where also, for the benefit of the unlearned, appeared a golden symbol in the form of a huge pestle and mortar ; as it was however equally certain, that her skin was of a " transparent whiteness," and that she possessed " a profusion of auburn hair, languishing blue eyes, and numberless nameless graces," charms which were conspicuous in *Almeria, or the Orphan of the Vale*, she persuaded herself that she was destined to fill a higher station than to transmit to posterity the profits of the pestle and mortar. Under these impressions, the advances made by one Mr. Timothy Trigge, her father's apprentice, were repelled with disdain ; the more so, as his person was exactly the reverse of her favourite, Bellamont, in the new novel

of "A Father's Frowns, and a Lover's Sighs:" other suitors too had been rejected for the same reason, when her beauty attracted the notice of Mr. Apreece, a gentleman of fortune, who had been a short time in the neighbourhood; but it so happened, that notwithstanding her anxiety to resemble the refined heroines of romance, Letitia's appearance betrayed such an inordinate attachment to shewy attire, that Mr. Apreece was so far under a mistake with regard to her character, as to make overtures that did not at all fall in with her notions of her future destiny; and it was owing to the interposition and advice he received from Mr. Mainwaring's father, that his proposals were made in an acceptable form. On Miss Lampet's becoming Mrs. Apreece, the consequence attached to her new situation soon put to flight her visions of romance, and the substantial dwelling-house of Plâs Llan-

coed she found a very comfortable substitute for castles in the air.

At this time young Mainwaring, her second husband, was

——the whining school-boy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school.

But after the lapse of fifteen years, when by the death of Mr. Apreece, she was left a rich widow, she thought she could not better shew her gratitude to the father, than by admitting his son (now a handsome young man of twenty) to a participation of her ample fortune. As his perceptive powers, however, were not remarkably acute, she found some little difficulty in making him understand these extraordinary emotions of gratitude. Her frequent observations about being a lone woman ; the burthen of having so large

a fortune to look after; and the advantages taken, where there was no *master* of a family, demanded, as he thought, some seasonable expressions of condolence for the loss of Mr. Apreece; but as by degrees, her hints afforded a more pointed inference, the young man ventured to understand her, and the business was settled.

The widow had taken care to secure her fortune to herself, and Mainwaring found that she now complained of none of those difficulties which she had so lately deprecated; he perceived she intended to let none of her authority pass out of her hands, and that in the management of their household he was of no higher consequence than her favourite lap-dog.

Mr. Mainwaring having been unaccustomed to polished society, his wife,

though little qualified for the task, undertook to tutor him how to conduct himself: his natural shyness however baffled all her efforts, and he felt so conscious of ignorance and awkwardness, that, rather than expose himself in conversation, he was content to dwell in insignificance. Mrs. Mainwaring, on the contrary, with confident manners, and valuing herself on that virtue which had raised her from her humble station to her present affluence, assumed a consequence that could not be tolerated in well-bred circles: and except her acquaintance in the neighbourhood of her residence, her friends consisted of persons with whom she got acquainted at watering-places, where she was fond of spending several months in the year; always giving the preference to secondary places, where the arrival of her equipage excited a sensation, which expensive dress and preposterous fashions, constantly kept

alive. It was the interest of the inhabitants to feed her vanity, and she in return, extolled the beauties and advantages of places where she could be queen of the walk, and affect patronage. Her name appeared to all cases of distress; to all raffle-subscriptions; she delighted to see play-bills headed "By the desire of Mrs. Mainwaring," though a barn was to be the scene of action; and an account of a ball and supper given by Mrs. Mainwaring at ——mouth, having found its way into the London papers, filled her with conceit for the remainder of the season.

Such were the pair who were now announced in Mrs. Jones's "best parlour;" the lady was upon a large scale dressed in strict conformity to "*La Belle Assemblée*," for the month, and ambling into the room with an air of importance,

proceeded to a seat which had been reserved for her at the upper end of the room ; while the “ partner of her greatness,” scarcely advancing farther than the door, dropt into the first seat that presented itself.

Mrs. Mainwaring in a consequential air, began apologizing for coming so late ; “ but really,” said she, with a consolatory bow to Mrs. Jones ; “ really, as I say, people that keep their own carriage, are more dependant than those who hire : for what with the horses being ill at one time, and the coachman at another, one never knows when one can depend on having one’s own carriage : then at parties, one’s always obliged to go away, as I say, just to a minute.”

Mrs. Jones extolled the elegance of Mrs. Mainwaring’s equipage, and sought

to advertize the importance of her guest by inquiring after her grapery.

“ Ah, dear me,” cried Mrs. Mainwaring; “ that’s another grievance; all our grapes are quite lost: I had, I assure you, as fine a shew as any round the country, but unfortunately the glasses were left open one frosty night, and there was an end of the grapes.”

“ What a pity !” observed Mr. Jones, “ and after such expense too.”

“ ’Tisn’t for that ; but I don’t know what I shall do without ’em ; I that have been so accustomed to fruit in winter and summer, as I say, all as one ; why I shan’t know where I am.”

“ It may put her in mind of old times, perhapth,” lisped Miss Dowling to Ponsonby, in a close whisper: “ she was

only a poor 'pothecary's daughter ; but it theems she's forgot the thign of the pethle and mortar."

" It's no use, as I say," continued Mrs. Mainwaring, " to give gardeners high wages, and keep helpers, and go to such expense as I have, and after all to be no better off, as I say, than as if I had nothing of the kind at all ; it's past all bearing ; as I say, the more servants one has, and the higher wages one gives, the worse every thing is done ; here have I four or five men servants, and half a dozen women, and yet, if you'll believe me, when I complain of neglect, they grumble about having too much work to do : nobody knows the troubles of a large establishment, but those, as I say, who have had experience of them."

This harangue was interrupted by the entrance of tea, which was handed about

by an awkward man engaged for the occasion, assisted by Mrs. Jones's parlour-maid, who followed close behind with hot buttered cakes. After this ceremony was over, a whist party was formed, which broke up the formidable semicircle.

“ We've nobody else coming,” said Mrs. Jones, “ except Mr. John Barton; I hope he won't disappoint us, such a nice, pleasant, lively young man: he's lately come into a very good fortune I find.”

“ Oh, yes sure,” cried Mrs. Mainwaring from the whist table; “ and he spends it with a proper spirit; and so he should; I like to see people of fortune, as I say, live as they ought to do. Mr. Pratten, will you like to bet half a crown on the rubber.”

“ I must beg leave, Madam,” said Mr. Pratten, in a coarse firm voice ; “ to be excused, if you please ; ’tis what I never suffer myself to do : and I think playing shillings makes it come quite high enough.”

“ Ah, well ! I think you’re quite in the right Mr. Pratten ; every one is to judge for themselves in these cases ; shillings is quite high enough : but as I say, I am so in the habit of playing half crowns and betting crowns, that—”

“ Do you mean half-crown *pints*, Ma’am ?”

“ Oh yes, and higher too,” returned Mrs. Mainwaring with a chuckling laugh.

“ There may be very serious sums lost

then," said Mr. Jones with a calculating aspect.

" Ah, well, don't let us talk about losses," cried Mrs. Mainwaring, " I dare say you and I shall give Mr. Pratten and Mr. Meredith a trimming."

Mrs. Jones now proposed a round game for the young people, which appearing to meet general approbation, they sat down to pam-loo.

" Jem, you're not to play," said Mrs. Pratten.

" Law, mother," grumbled Jem " why not ?"

Mrs. Pratten made an expressive sign.

" Law, why they're going to play

quite low ;” remurmured Jem ; “ Mrs. Jones said so.”

“ Well, we’ll see.”

“ Oh, dear ! here comes Mr. John Barton,” cried Mrs. Jones. “ Better late than never, Sir.”

Mr. Barton advanced, making familiar bows all round the table, including Mr. Ponsonby, to whom he had not yet been introduced ; and adroitly wedging himself between Miss Dowling and Elizabeth, exclaimed, “ How happy could I be with either ;” why, Dick Pratten, man, how come you to let the ladies sit together ?”

“ You’re losing time,” said Mrs. Jones, “ you’d better settle who is to deal.”

“ Why you have been quite a stranger among us, Mr. John Barton,” cried Mrs. Pratten; “ we’ve quite missed you lately.”

“ Oh, I’ve been upon my travels, Ma’am; I don’t like biding still at one place; I like to be here, there, and everywhere; but I’ve been home a week now. There, you’re to deal, Dick; the knave’s come to you, he knows his man. How come it you weren’t at Mrs. Cottle’s last night, Miss Dowling? Oh, you ought to have been there; I assure you we had a very nice hop. I’ll tell’e how it came about: the old folks you see were all at cards; so what did we do but roll up the carpet in the parlour in a twinkling, and Lucy Cottle played upon the *piana*; to be sure we kickt up a fine dust, and kept it up till past one o’clock. Oh, and the best of the fun was, Mrs. Cottle asked me to make the punch; and, by George,

I tickled the old ladies with the proper stingo, and sent 'em all home fuddled."

"For thame, Mr. John Barton," cried Miss Dowling: "how you do love mithchief."

"He's such a rattle," observed Mrs. Jones to Ponsonby.

Mr. Barton had more to say to Miss Dowling about Mrs. Cottle's party, which was communicated in a whisper, and called from her a reprimand.

"Law, Mr. John Barton, you do make one laugh so—do be quiet now. How fond you are of quithing."

The interest of the game now so completely took possession of the young Prattens, as to make them lose sight of their company behaviour, and indulge

in their accustomed uncouth familiarity, while their mother, from time to time, called them to order.

“ Lor, how you do deal, Jem : there now, you’ve turn’d up the card ; I on’t have’n.”

“ Why then, ’t isn’t my fault, ’tis the cards do stick so,” returned Jem, wetting his thumb to remedy the evil. “ There, hearts are trumps ; do you play Miss Becky ?”

“ No, no,” said Mr. Barton jocosely, “ Miss Becky can’t play ; she got no heart.”

“ That’s more than *you* know, Mr.”

“ Well, I’ll be bound,” said he laughing loudly ; “ you wouldn’t give thank’e for a hand without a heart.”

“ You seem very merry there, good folks,” cried Mrs. Mainwaring; “ Mr. John Barton, as usual, the fiddle of the company.”

“ Lor now, Mr. Ponsonby, you’ve played before your turn,” cried Jem: “ so now I’m loo’d by it—’taint fair.”

“ Nonsense Jem, ’tis you *will* play on such vile hands, I don’t wonder at your losing so.”

“ Why now, mother, I tell’e, if Mr. Ponsonby hadn’t played the deuce—”

“ He has played the deuse with *you*, Jem, with a vengeance,” said Mr. Barton, with another loud lough.

“ There, I’ve nabb’d your queen, Miss Lizer,” cried Dick; “ what d’ye think of that!”

“ Can any body give me two thicth-penthes for a thilling ?”

“ My ! how you are winning, Becky ! only look what a pile of silver she has got there ; now Mr. Ponsonby, ’tis your deal, and you must put in ; oh, and you was loo’d besides !”

“ Jem, don’t let your tongue run on so.”

“ By jingo ! Becky’s got a pam-flush again ; I’ll be hanged if—”

“ Jem !”

A slight pause at the round game was amply supplied by the loud voice of Mrs. Mainwaring, rating her partner for leading from his tenace.

Mr. Meredith’s voice, too, grated on

Elizabeth's ear, in a tone of so much irritation, that Mrs. Meredith sidled towards the whist party, intent on a pacific negotiation.

“ Pam be thivil,” said Miss Dowling.

“ Oh, murder! there I'm dish'd.”

“ He knows his dooty,” pursued Miss Dowling.

“ Well, if ever I see any thing like it,” said Jem, in a grumbling tone.

“ Why, you're come from the *Mumbles*, I fancy,” cried Mr. Barton with a laugh. “ Upon my word, Miss Dowling, I'm afraid you'll suffer for all this : you can't expect good luck at *another* game : you'll get a very Turk for a husband.”

Mr. Mainwaring passed the evening by looking on at the card tables: his conversational talents being no further called in question, than by having to reply to such interrogations as, "don't you ever play cards, Sir?" or, "don't you *never*," according to the speaker.

"Law, Betsy Meredith," cried Dick, "you do whip up the cards so, I don't know what I'm about; don't e snap'em up so, it makes me all betwattled: there! I got a trick; stop Becky, you're taking too much, 'tis but four a trick—put it all down again, and let's reckon it."

"Dick! behave yourself."

"It's all very right," cried Mr. Barton, "'tis five a trick; five fives is twenty-five; take my word for it; leave alone Cocker."

“ Don’t play *that*, Jem,” said Mrs. Pratten, “ why, how can’e be so follish ! no wonder you lose, if you play like that. Stop ! don’t be in such a hurry ; there, keep up your hand ; you let every body look over you. Come, Jem ! put in the king to be sure ; why, what are you thinking of ? ”

“ Law, mother, how you do bother one ! there now, I’m loo’d again ; I never see any thing like it. I do think Becky keeps pam in her pockut.”

“ Jem ! you make too much noise ; I hear your voice louder than any body else’s. ’Tis very purvoking to be sure,” continued Mrs. Pratten, in a tone of compassion ; “ he had three trumps Mr. Ponsonby, and raly very good ones. Upon my word Jem, I got no more silver ; you must apply to your father, you raly must.”

“ Dear !” exclaimed Mrs. Jones,
“ I’m quite sorry he has such ill luck.”

“ ’Twas very silly of him to play ;”
rejoined Mrs. Pratten, in an under tone :
“ he knows nothing of the game, and to
go on losing his money in that way is
quite ridicklus !”

“ He can’t have lost much, Ma’am,”
observed Elizabeth.

“ Ah, my dear, it’s a good deal for a
lad like him : he has lost five or six
shillings already !”

“ Dear, I’m very sorry,” said Mrs.
Jones.

“ Yes, he has indeed.”

A scene of confusion now occurred at
the whist table : it was sudden and vio-

lent, but of short duration ; the loo party, without a suspicion of the cause, beheld Mrs. Mainwaring floundering on the floor, bestrewed with cards and candlesticks.

The gentlemen hastened to her assistance ; and being safely deposited in a chair, she sat panting and fanning herself, with one hand locked in Mr. Mainwaring's, while the room rang with inquiries and explanations ; when it appeared that a black cat had unperceived entered the apartment, and with unparalleled audacity had taken possession of Mrs. Mainwaring's capacious lap, whereupon that lady, starting from her chair, her head came in contact with a girandole, her feathers caught fire, and rebounding on her seat, she had lost her balance, and nearly compelled the table to accompany her in her fall.

“ Don’t frighten yourself, my love,” said Mrs. Mainwaring to her spouse ;
“ I’m not at all hurt, but I can’t bear the sight of a cat ; I never could : I beg I may not discompose the company ; pray go on with your game.”

It was not an easy matter to comply with this request, the suppression of laughter being paramount to all other concerns : the young Prattens had so little command of their risible faculties, that their mother’s *Jeming* and *Dicking* them had very little effect ; and it was a great relief when supper was announced.

“ That’s a good hearing ; my stomach has cried cup-board this half-hour.”

“ Jem !”

Mrs. Jones triumphantly led the way

to a well-supplied table, to which the Pratten family did ample justice.

“ Mr. Jones, I *must* thank’e for a little more of the duck, ’tis so uncommon good,” cried Mrs. Pratten ; “ to say the truth, we dined rather early to-day,—any part, Sir.—Jem !”

“ Mr. Barton, I hope you take care of the ladies,” said Mr. Jones ; “ and, if you please, I’ll trouble you to cut that tongue.”

“ Certainly, Sir, with the greatest pleasure. Miss Dowling, shall I give you some ? or is one enough for a lady ? eh ? ha ! ha ! ha !”

“ Come, don’t be always running your riggs.”

“ We are indebted to Mrs. Main-

waring for that fine dish of sea-kale," said Mrs. Jones: "I hope you'll take some, Mr. Ponsonby."

"Oh, I am sure I wish I had any thing better worth your acceptance," cried Mrs. Mainwaring; "I am always very glad, as I say, when I have any little rarity to offer my friends."

"This is remarkably fine," said Ponsonby; then, turning to Elizabeth, he observed, "what a valuable acquisition to a party this Mrs. Mainwaring is: Miss Dowling has let me into her private history, but I had no idea that she was to contribute in so many ways to the evening's entertainment."

"Do let me recommend you a slice of the tongue," said Mrs. Pratten to Mr.

Ponsonby, who sat next to her ; “ you’ll find it very tender ; indeed all Mrs. Jones’s things are so nice and good. I’ll thank you for another slice, Mr. John Barton. This tongue is cured at home I am sure ; and it’s much the best way ; then one knows what one’s eating. I don’t rightly understand Mr. Ponsonby,” continued she, lowering her voice into a familiar tone, “ how long your stay in Swansea is to be ; but Mr. Pratten and me will be exceeding happy, Sir, to see you—(Jem !)—and—I hope soon to fix on some evening to have the pleasure of your company, and the Merediths, in a free way.”

“ You are very polite, Ma’am,” returned Ponsonby ; “ I believe I shall quit Swansea in about a week.”

“ Oh, ho,” said Mrs. Pratten, sim-

pering, “ ’tis to be so soon as that, is it ? well, I hope we shall see you between this and then ; we seldom give large parties, but *I* think a sociable evening like this, is a deal pleasanter, in my opinion, than a formal set party.”

“ Becky,” cried Mrs. Jones, “ what will you have ?”

“ I’ve had a thyllabub, thank’e, Ma’am.”

“ Take another, my dear.”

“ Won’t you take any of the sweets, Sir ?” said Mr. Barton, addressing Ponsoby ; “ No ? why, then, Mr. John Barton, *you* will,” said he, addressing himself, “ yes, sure, Mr. Barton will take some jelly.”

“ How *can* you be tho thilly !”

After the cloth was withdrawn, a bowl of punch made its appearance, and Mr. Barton was asked for a song : he readily complied ; and, in a ridiculous attempt to copy Braham, almost stunned the company with “ The last words of Marmion.” “ There,” said he, as he finished, “ now I’ve earned a right to call on any lady I please for a song ; so I beg leave to call on Miss Betsy Meredith.”

Elizabeth politely declined ; and, after she had been for half an hour assailed with, “ Birds that *can* sing and *won’t* sing,” &c. ; “ No song no supper ;” “ Come, Miss Meredith, we are all waiting,” accompanied with a loud rapping on the table, which interrupted all conversation ; Mrs. Mainwaring observed

that her carriage had been announced some time, and rose to take leave : she very condescendingly offered to set Mrs. Pratten down ; and the party soon afterwards broke up.

Mrs. Jones seemed in high good humour, and whispered to Elizabeth, “ I think it all went off very well.”

Elizabeth had not yet completed all her purchases, and Ponsonby frequently accompanied her and Mrs. Meredith in their shopping expeditions : they entered a linen-draper's, and, as ill luck would have it, Mrs. Dowling, the proscribed Mrs. Dowling, was in the shop, with

Rebecca and her sister, who was just arrived from a visit in the country.

“ So ! how d’ye all do ? ” cried Mrs. Dowling ; “ you haven’t finished your preparations yet, I suppose ; ” added she, with a sly glance towards Ponsonby ; “ and there I’ve been thinking to give you a call ever so many times, and never been able to yet ; I’ve been so busy. I fully intended it this morning, and here my daughter is just come home to get some smart things to wear at a wedding ; so you see our errands are a little similar.”

“ Yes, I’m to be bride-maid to a friend of mine, where I’ve been ; the gentleman, I believe, is somebody you know pretty well, Elizabeth ; and if you had liked *him* as much as he liked *you* —can’t you guess ? how dull you are ;

his name begins with a **D** and ends with a **h**ef:—well, I never saw a girl keep her countenance so: but, I say, Elizabeth, you have not introduced me.”

Elizabeth was now constrained to present to Ponsonby, Miss Matilda Dowling, attired in a new, yet heinously unfashionable riding-habit, tucked up in festoons, displaying a villanous shoe, and an open-worked cotton stocking: a provincial black beaver-hat completed the figure.

“ I was very sorry, Mrs. Meredith, that I could not meet you all at Mrs. Jones’s the other night,” said Mrs. Dowling; “ but I have been so ill you can’t think. I caught such a cold as never was; ’twas my own fault, to be sure; but there (lowering her voice), I wanted, you see, to get over the ironing,

so I took it into my head to lend a help, and there I stayed up, hard at work till past twelve o'clock ; it quite knocked me up, and I got a terrible crick in my neck, standing in such a draught in our back-kitchen among the wet clothes ; but there, when I *do* begin, I can't help going on to finish what I am about.—What d'ye think of this cloth ? You see, I want to make myself about half a dozen aprons, just to wear about the house ; it saves the fronts of one's gowns so : this 'll do very well, I was thinking ;—'tis coarse ; but law what does it signify what one wears out of sight."

To put a stop to these memoirs of back-kitchens and coarse aprons, Mrs. Meredith desired the shopman to shew her some muslins, and while the ladies were canvassing the merits of the articles before them, Ponsonby occasionally

looked on, and occasionally lounged at the door. His eyes were accidentally attracted to the opposite house : it was near the Castle, a corner house and a grocer's shop ; the sign, Three Crows. There, thought he, lived her grandfather, "*the haberdasher, who sold all sorts of things.*"

The specimens which Ponsonby had seen of some of Elizabeth's connexions, were not such as to add any respectability to the alliance he was about to form, and which, he was now convinced, was not altogether consistent with his own rank in life. He felt conscious how much he had disappointed the views of his family ; but his high sense of honour, and his attachment to Elizabeth, equally forbade a retreat. He considered, however, that he should remove her to a more refined society, and

that all intercourse between her and the most objectionable part of her family would be cut off.

The important engagement he was going to enter into, made him reflect on his past conduct, and he was now seriously determined by his future application to his profession, to make amends for his former unsteadiness.

END OF VOL. I.

